

BESIDE THE RIVER.

VOL. III.

BESIDE THE RIVER

A TALE

BY

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“PATTY,” “DIANE,”

“IN THE SWEET SPRING TIME,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

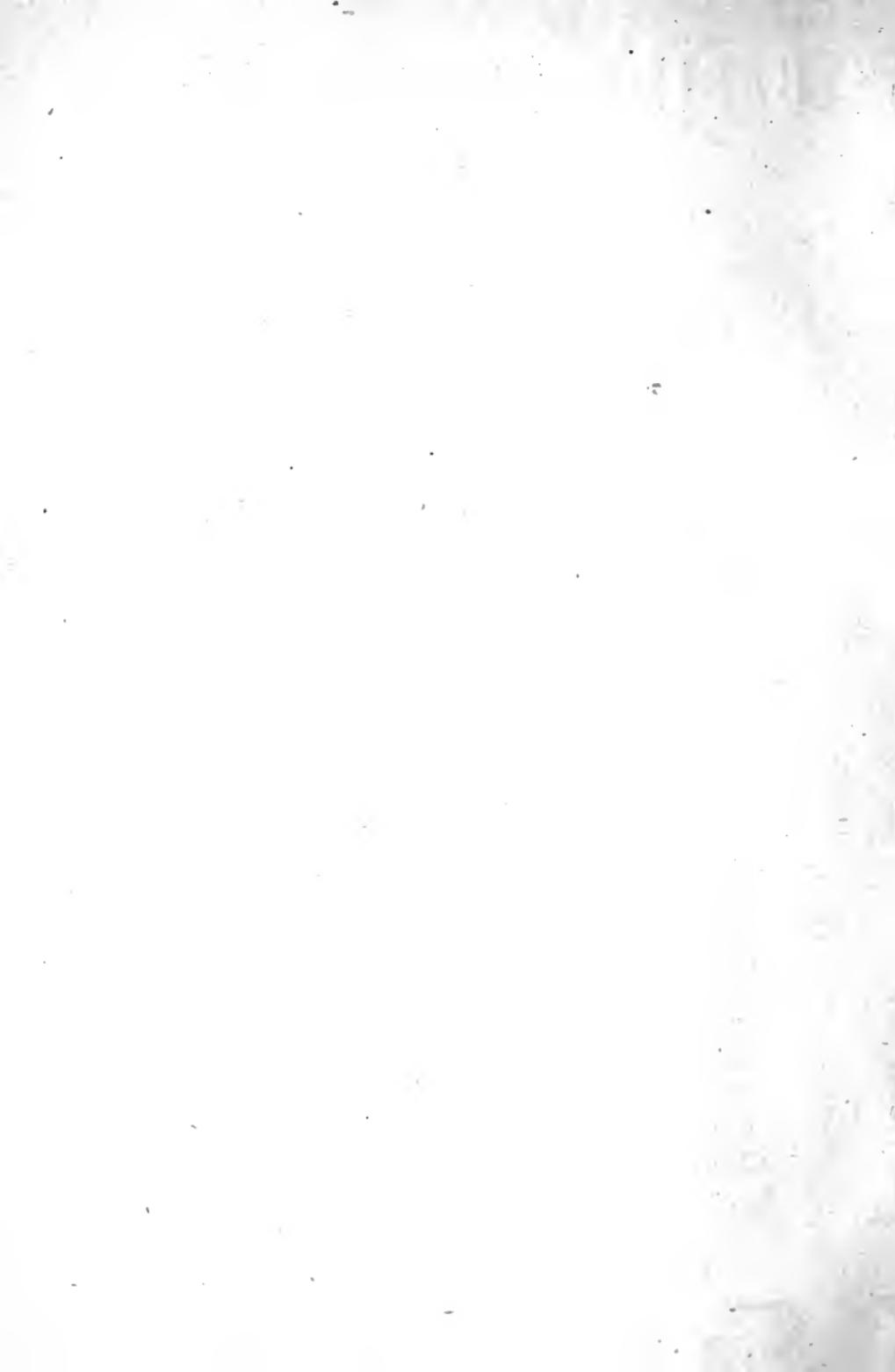
VOL. III.

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BESIDE THE RIVER.

CHAPTER I.

THE CURÉ'S PERPLEXITY.

WHEN, while travelling in France and Belgium, one comes upon an isolated presbytery, in some wretched, lonely village, with its plot of flowers, or sometimes a paddock in front, its kitchen garden behind, and close by the never absent orchard, with perhaps a crop of barley, whitening beneath rosy apples and golden plums—one is apt, as one looks at the miserable huts around, with a dunghill under each front window, and a pool of black water before each door, to spend a

good deal of pity on Monsieur le Curé, who goes on from month to month, and year to year and hardly ever exchanges a sentence with anyone but the peasants around him, more like the pigs that feed beside their houses than human beings.

Perhaps the pity bestowed is often wasted. The priest, if he be a good man, has two fixed ideas—he must take care of the souls of his flock, and he must make as much money as he can for the Church. His garden and a bit of land give him sufficient occupation, and he has absolutely no cares. His pig, his chickens, and his vegetables, with the corn in his granary, suffice for his simple wants. He even prepares his own coffee from dried roots; and almost always he has a notable housekeeper, who will usually make five sous go as far as ten would in less skilled hands. He does not usually read anything unconnected with his daily duties;

there is no mental hunger in his serene soul, and, as he stands under the leafy arch over his gateway, white-haired and black-robed, with his benevolent pink face, and in his hand a well-thumbed breviary, with scarlet book-marks therein—he makes a picture suggestive of far more idyllic and of less bucolic life than the actual life he leads.

And yet sometimes there is a reverse to this picture. The Curé may be a man of gentle breeding and cultivated mind, born with that thirst for culture which no employment however engrossing can stifle; then the monotony and isolation are painful. Monsieur Hallez was in this case, he had often wished he lived nearer a town, so that he might sometimes consult with his fellow-priests, and also be less isolated with regard to current events; but he had never had the wish so strongly as when he stood alone in his study after Edmond Dupuis left him. He

felt as if a blow had stunned him, and indeed he had got a heavy blow.

Jeanne was to him what a child might have been, and being a man of warm and strong affections, he had suffered for her in her trials as a father would have suffered. But he had hoped, and he had also bid the girl hope, that some day it would be God's will to restore her to Edmond Dupuis.

The Curé had carefully studied Madame Delimoy, and, although he had no means of knowing, he felt pretty sure that Jeanne's lover had not been fairly dealt with by her grandmother; it seemed to him, too, that the old woman who had lived alone for so many years before Jeanne came to her, had been selfish in exacting the promise she had exacted from her grand-daughter. When Madame Delimoy died, Monsieur Hallez had at first planned to find Jeanne a home in a convent near Rimay till he could discover whether Ed-

mond still wished to marry her. The Curé believed in true love, and in constancy, and it would have been a labour of love with him to bring this pair together ; but Mademoiselle de Matagne's sudden appearance on the scene, and her prompt offer to befriend Jeanne, seemed to him too providential to withstand. He saw, too, that the girl clung to this kind new friend, and he hoped that she would arrange matters with Edmond Dupuis far better than he could hope to do.

It might have been better for Jeanne if the good priest had been less humble, had relied more on his own judgment, and had acted promptly in the matter. By the time that Jeanne had become intimate enough with Mademoiselle de Matagne to tell her story to her, Edmond had promised to marry Pauline.

Monsieur Hallez stood still in his study, with bent head and hands clasped together,

stricken to the heart, with this great sorrow which had fallen on his beloved Jeanne. And, worse than all, he must tell her what he knew ; he must, humanly speaking, himself lay this grief on his dear child.

He was sure that she did not know it. In her letter to him written from Montcour announcing their journey to Spa, she had spoken to him the hope she felt that, now that they were likely to visit more than one town, she might perhaps see Edmond Dupuis. Monsieur Hallez had thought much about this touching hope, timidly expressed, and he had felt a longing to help Jeanne, though he could not well see the way. Jeanne had begged him not to speak of her to Madame Boulotte, and indeed he felt that the widow had resented the part he had taken in the girl's disappearance. They had once met and spoken in Rimay ; since then he had seen Madame Boulotte

cross the street to get out of his way. And now after what he had heard, when he desired to warn Jeanne, to tell her that every loving thought she bestowed on the love of her girlhood was henceforth deadly sin, and must be checked even if the effort cost her an agony of pain—he did not know where to find her. She had said that she should not write again till their plans seemed more settled; that she hoped they would soon return to Château Mont-cour, and, if they did, would it not be possible for Monsieur le Curé to get away for a few days, and to spend them with her.

“It would be too delightful,” she wrote, “and indeed I shall give you no peace, Father, till you say Yes. When next I write it will be to tell you we are expecting your visit.”

But, though weeks had passed, there had been no letter from Jeanne, and the poor Curé did not know what to do. It was horrible to think that the poor child

might meet Monsieur Dupuis before she knew of his marriage.

The Curé had an old sister, a mother of many children ; if he could only reach her and send her to Jeanne, it would be the best way, he thought a woman would know how to tell the news to her tenderly ; a letter would be so sudden.

“ And even then,” he said sadly, “ I do not know where to find the dear child. But how faithless I am ! André Hallez, you who preach to others to trust in God, is there not One who, if you ask Him, will strengthen this poor lamb to bear the cross he sends ? Surely prayer can do more to help Jeanne than any other way.”

He had said to Edmond Dupuis he had no reason to suppose that Jeanne still loved him, there was a possibility “ that change of scene ” might have changed her. But though he said this to himself the Curé did not believe it.

"I must pray for her," he said.

And when the good priest came in from evening service in the little church where he had asked his flock to pray for "one about to meet a grievous trouble," he sat down and wrote as tenderly as he could to Jeanne the story of Edmond Dupuis. He was careful not to speak of Edmond personally, and he advised Jeanne to try and forget him. But he was very heavy-hearted when he had finished the letter. He addressed it to Mademoiselle de Matagne, Château Montcour, Remouchamps. But he waited to see the postman next morning, and gave it into his own hands. Even with that address he was afraid of revealing Jeanne's hiding-place to Vidonze.

"If he were a better man," he said, "I should be thankful to see her married to him; but Jeanne could not love a man of that stamp; and I am sure she will not marry unless she loves."

He turned back to the presbytery, but a cloud had fallen over his peaceful life. He could only think of Jeanne and her deep sorrow.

CHAPTER II.

ELISE HERKENNE'S SCHEMES.

IT is a true if an old image—but then there is nothing new under the sun, and, moreover, unless one can better them, which rarely happens, old things are better than new things, an adventurous assertion in this self-glorifying generation, which, in its own judgment, has improved on all that has gone before—the old image in question is that of a pebble dropped into still water, and the ever-spreading circle so small an event creates.

That drive to the cottage beside the

river, which seemed to Pauline when she set out on it a mere pastime, had during the weeks that followed spoiled many lives which seemed removed from its influence. Cheerful Jules Baconfoy, who usually shook off vexation as if it were a troublesome fly, found himself continually wondering whether Edmond had recovered his spirits ; and Madame Boulotte was so troubled that she had made up her mind, “if that silly little Pauline does not soon write,” to go over to Dinant and judge for herself what was amiss between Edmond Dupuis and his wife. But these were the results of sympathy, like the outside circles on the pool scarcely stirring the smooth water beyond ; there were two other lives which the shock had agitated so violently that it seemed as if the circle might deepen into a whirlpool, so incessant was the stir around.

The letter which Vidonze had written from the vine-covered inn at Remouchamps

greatly alarmed Mademoiselle Herkenne. It showed her that she had been deceived in fancying the man she loved was cured of his passion for Jeanne Lahaye; and she felt keenly afraid that, as he had found the beginning of the clue, it might unravel itself to the end, and reveal Jeanne's present abode.

Dinant was full of people, and Antoine's photographs were in constant demand. It was only when night had closed in that Elise had time to think, and bend her scheming brain into an endeavour to meet this danger.

At first thought was like a blank wall, there was no outlet. She had studied Vidonze carefully, and she felt how almost impossible it would be to turn him from a purpose, once decided on. Then she estimated the profits that he had reaped; the change that had come into his affairs since she had taken the management of them. If she could not count on his

gratitude, would not self-interest have some power over his affections?

"I am only what life has made me," she said, drawing herself up, while her thin lips curled cynically. "I can never count on what are called 'good motives'—I mean, superfluous motives—all that is real comes from self. If Antoine loved me then gratitude would be a real motive, because it would give him pleasure to show it to me; but I do not believe in what is beyond nature. If I can prove to him the increase in his income, and say at the same time, 'I intend to leave your service,' his gratitude, or self-interest, for it is the same thing, after all, may take the shape of liking me; he may say, 'No, stay with me, and ask what inducement you please for remaining' and I ——"

She stopped. Then she rose up, with a movement of repulsion, as if she shrank from some visible object of

dislike; her dark face crimsoned, and she covered her eyes with her hands.

She stood struggling with herself for many minutes. Her love for Vidonze, every better part of her nature, recoiled from offering herself as the price of her services ; and unless she did this, what remained ? Hope, that precious jewel of life, had lost its dazzling lustre in her eyes. Life held no glamour for Elise; she saw it in its naked truth, stripped of all disguise and softening of outline. Antoine did not love her; he could not, because he loved Jeanne Lahaye. With the name came a vivid vision of the pale, noble face, and of the fearless truth she had read in those brown eyes. She could have stamped with fury.

“ She is pure, but she is cold ; and that is the sort of woman to hold Antoine till death. He would not care for ardour like his own ; indifference would spur him on to conquest.”

She knew that Jeanne had fled from Vidonze, and she thought that possibly the girl cared for Edmond Dupuis; but this last had not been proved; and, moreover, Elise felt that the owner of that face would never yield to her love for another woman's husband; still Jeanne would not have hung over those views as she had done, if she had not felt some special interest in them. A chink of light at last—and she started as it flashed into her dark, scheming brain.

It was possible that Jeanne had never heard of Edmond's marriage with Pauline.

“Why should I not find her out, and tell her that Dupuis and his wife are here, and that she runs the risk of meeting Vidonze any day?”

A smile spread over her sombre face. But Elise Herkenne was not a woman to act on impulse. She examined this idea

carefully, and she found that only the first side of it promised help. As she turned it round she saw that it was possible that Jeanne did not love Edmond Dupuis, that she knew of his marriage, and also of his presence in Dinant; again, if she did love him, and shrank from the risk of meeting him, the very fear of herself might make her think of marriage, and in this case Antoine Vidonze would have as good a chance as anyone else—perhaps a better one.

"Yes," said Elise, thoughtfully, "she is more likely to keep single if she does not learn Dupuis is married; and while Antoine is watching for her beside the Amblève, he will not dream of her presence here."

There was certain risk if Vidonze came to Dinant; but this must be endured. If matters were as she hoped with Jeanne, she would avoid Antoine as much as ever, even if they met, and she then learned

from him the fact of Edmond's marriage. Elise smiled as she pictured the savage exultation with which the news would be told; this would destroy the photographer's own hopes with Jeanne.

"He loves her too much to be prudent," she thought, "and in such a moment he would destroy all chance of success; no man who really loves was ever wise in his way of telling his love—seldom wise in it at all. Blind fools!" her lips curled and quivered with furious contempt, "they lavish treasures on blocks of marble, and leave warm hearts to die of thirst."

But her passion exhausted her; she sat down again, and deliberately calmed herself, till she felt quiet enough to think again.

"I am much where I began," she thought, "except that I see less risk than I saw before in Antoine's coming here. Yes—he must come. I must and will see him. Why should I go on

longing like a silly school-girl, when I feel able to make things happen as I choose?"

And yet the greatest risk had happened, and she had not dreamed of it. It was strange that this keen-sighted woman never once thought of the risk there might be in the meeting of Pauline Dupuis and Jeanne Lahaye.

CHAPTER III.

PAULINE'S CONFIDENCE.

IT was a brilliant morning, the wind was south-west, and a few detached, fleecy clouds moved now and then across the clear blue as if they were restless and did not enjoy the sunshine as all nature below them did. By midday these discontented clouds had called others to their council, and had so overspread the blue that now and then the sun himself was veiled by their restless and ruffled presence, and gave a pale, watery light instead of the warm gold of the earlier morning.

Monsieur Eugène had been more than usually absent at breakfast; but when Jeanne asked him if he wanted her, or if he had any commissions for her, he looked out of window before he answered.

“ You will not be able to go to the Hospice to-day, my child. We shall have rain before long.”

Jeanne was surprised. She had put the question as a matter of form, for Monsieur Eugène never interfered with her plans; usually he was too much wrapped up in his dreams of music to appear interested in the small affairs of life.

“ I do not mind rain much,” she said; “ perhaps the sky may clear before I go.”

He gave her a timid, wistful look. He was far less reserved with Jeanne as regarded music than he had been with his sister. Mademoiselle de Matagne had been an accomplished musician, and had visited

cities where the best music is to be heard ; and the nervous dreamer had often feared to ask her to listen to his somewhat crude creations ; but this simple Jeanne knew nothing of music as a science, though she adored its sound, and she loved to listen to the invalid as he sat improvising in the summer evenings. The girl loved to watch him too. His withered face glowed, and his pale eyes grew dark and luminous, as he spoke out his thoughts in music, carried out of his usual shyness by some irresistible force.

As Jeanne watched and thought, the idea came to her that he must be by nature garrulous, and that the words in which he could have revealed his feelings, checked from utterance by an invincible timidity, burst into life in music. She worshipped this almost hidden gift with a sort of tender reverence, and she had learned to interpret his wishes almost at once, and thus

saved him the need of effort, which she knew would be painful.

"There is something you wish," she said, lovingly; "what is it, dear uncle?"

He smiled kindly at her.

"I am always selfish to you, my Jeanne. Yes, I want you to listen to something that has come to me this morning, and that I fear to lose."

His withered face was very sweet with a beseeching expression as he looked at Jeanne.

She rose up, patted his shoulder, and then led the way to his study, and took her usual seat beside the piano.

He began, at first in a mournful strain with a sweet undertone, sounding now and then as if in protest; but as it went on the music became so pathetic that Jeanne was moved to tears. She almost laughed at herself, it seemed so foolish, but her heart, which had felt so bright and light in the sunshine, had grown suddenly

heavy ; she had no power against this sudden depression, or against the tears that stole down her cheeks. But the music changed ; it was still sad, but no longer pathetic, there was anguish, almost a moan, in it, like the wind careering over a bleak moor. The strain grew wilder, and more weird, charged as with a passionate despair, till the human element seemed to die out, and a mad turbulence hurried on the wasted fingers with vehement energy. Jeanne's eyes were fixed on Monsieur Eugène, there was no shrinking timidity in his face now. The power of his gift shone out triumphant, his eyes were brilliant and fearless ; it was as if some hidden treasure cave had suddenly burst open at the fulfilment of a spell.

“ If others could only see him like this,” the girl thought, how differently they would think of him ! but she looked sad. She knew that directly he ceased playing his timid, absent manner would close

over Monsieur Eugène; and that probably he would remain in his room for the rest of the day, with so distressing a nervous head-ache that he could not bear even her presence beside him. Presently the rapid fingers slackened, and then came a hurried strain with a sobbing undertone as if the sorrow lay quieted, but not quenched. Then he stopped suddenly, and gave Jeanne a bright, appealing look.

“It is beautiful. Ah, if you could only write it, it would make you ever so famous,” she said, warmly.

He flushed a little.

“I do not care for fame, dear child ; but I wish I could write it if you think it would give pleasure to others. I will try, yes, I should be glad, it would be my way of giving pleasure; I have no other.” He stole a little shame-faced look at her, and then he turned away.

Jeanne was deeply touched, it was the first time he had ever alluded to his own shyness, though he had more than once betrayed a consciousness of it. She took his hand and kissed it.

“Thank you, dear uncle, you have given me so much happiness ;” as she looked at him she was shocked to see how pale he grew, and how exhausted he looked. “You will lie down now, will you not ?” she said.

He did not answer, tears were running down his withered cheeks ; he was utterly worn out ; and when Jeanne hurried away and sent his man to him, he let himself be put on a sofa like a child, and he soon fell asleep.

The sky had cleared again while Jeanne sat listening ; and she started for the Hospice. The sun was shining when she began her walk, but she could not shake off the weird influence of the music ; she felt out of tune with the sunshine ; and when

she drew near the suburb of St. Médard, at one end of which the Hospice stands, and clouds once more obscured all brightness, they seemed more in keeping with her feelings. Monsieur Eugène's music had often made her sad, but this was scarcely sadness to-day, it was a chill of fear, a sensation that some unseen cause of terror lay near her—nay, Jeanne felt as if it were gradually approaching her with silent, stealing steps.

But the sight of Sister Sophie, at the farther end of the grass-grown avenue, with her jingling bunch of keys and her face a perfect sunbeam as she recognised her visitor, swept away the cloud from Jeanne's spirits as a broom clears away a noisome cobweb.

“Welcome many times, my dear young lady. I had but just let in our other sweet angel, Madame Pauline, and before I leave the gate I see you coming also.

It is a fortunate day for us, and for all our poor people when you two come."

"How are they all?" said Jeanne; "as well as when I was last here, I hope?"

Sister Sophie shook her head.

"I will not croak, it is better to leave that to the ravens; but"—she went on still smiling—"our dear Mother Rosalie has had a stroke, and she will not be here long."

Jeanne felt saddened again, she had grown fond of good-natured, gossiping Rosalie.

"Can I see her?" she said.

"Yes, certainly, if you wish it. She cannot speak, but she knows us, and a sight of your sweet face will do her good. What a difference there is in tastes! that sweet Madame Pauline has known the poor old creature longer than you have, but when I asked her to come and see her, she said she dared not, she had never

seen anyone so near death as we think dear Rosalie is."

Jeanne followed in silence; but when they reached the top of the stairs they were met by a sister, who said the doctor was with her patient, and that he did not wish her to see visitors.

"Well, well," said Sister Sophie, "Mademoiselle will have the goodness to talk to some of her other friends—Ah!" She crossed herself devoutly and pointed to the window. "Did you see the lightning, Mademoiselle, and look how dark it grows! I fear a storm hangs over Dinant."

She pointed to the window in the gallery which faced the river, and there was a livid purple cloud hanging over the cliff, behind the houses of Dinant; hanging so low that it seemed as if it must burst over the town.

"Monsieur Eugène was right," Jeanne said to herself.

The cloud spread rapidly, the storm grew worse, and the metallic glare of the lightning gave a ghastly brightness to the room where Jeanne sat, talking to some of the inmates of the Hospice, the thunder crashed so frightfully that the house seemed to rock to and fro. As the blue flame flashed over their pale faces, some of the girls shrieked, and others crouched beside Jeanne and hid their faces in her lap. She was trying to soothe and re-assure them, when Sister Sophie came in, with an unusually anxious face.

“Holy Virgin!”—she crossed herself—“you have indeed a task, Mademoiselle; but you will find Madame Pauline in the parlour; the storm has frightened her sadly; and when I said that you were here, she begged that you would come to her.”

Jeanne would have liked to stay with the frightened girls, but the sister

held the door open for her to pass out

The whitewashed parlour was bare of all ornaments but a crucifix. Pauline, sat crouched in a high-backed chair, her eyes covered with her hands; but, when the door opened, she started up. At the sight of Jeanne, she ran forward and clasped her arms round her in agony of terror. She tried to speak, but only a burst of hysterical sobbing came.

Jeanne was touched. She passed her arm lovingly round the clinging girl, and tried to soothe her terror.

"It will soon be over," she said; "come and sit down. I am sorry you were left alone."

Pauline wiped her eyes, and then stole an ashamed look at Jeanne.

"Ah, you will think me such a miserable coward, but I cannot help it, I dared not go among the girls; I feared they would laugh at me. I was so

frightened when I saw the lightning that I ran away and covered up my face ; but I could not shut out the thunder. Oh, it is terrible ! Ah, *mon Dieu !*" she cried out, as the lightning flashed into the room, and the thunder bellowed among the hills.

Jeanne stood beside her, holding her hands, and now and then trying to quiet her ; but even when, after a while, the violence of the storm lessened, Pauline shuddered as if she still heard it.

" My husband would be so vexed," she sobbed, and she looked up at Jeanne as if she were a superior being. " He says I am so silly to be frightened ; but what can one do when one cannot help it ? " she gave a faint smile.

Her eyes looked imploring, and so sweet that Jeanne thought the husband could not be really hard in judging this tender, clinging creature.

"Fear in a storm is a question of temperament, I suppose. It is hard to be angry with any one about it," said Jeanne; "some of those poor girls were sadly alarmed."

Pauline gave her a timid, grateful look. She drew her chair closer to Jeanne's, and softly stroked the back of her hand.

"You were not afraid. Ah, I wish I were like you. I don't fancy you ever feel silly—there again!" She trembled violently as a louder peal once more shook the house. "You did not even shudder."

"My nerves are stronger than yours, that is all," Jeanne said, "and I have very good health."

"But, surely,"—Pauline clasped her hands tightly over Jeanne's—"you feel some fear?"

Jeanne smiled. "I feel awe, but I do not much know how I feel," she said.

Pauline shook her head. She had mas-

tered her sobs, but she still looked white and scared.

"Ah, you are not married. If you had to be always trying to please your husband, you would know too much about your own feelings," she said, sadly.

Jeanne was startled, almost shocked. She sat silent; she wished the storm would cease.

Pauline's eyes grew large as they gazed at her new friend.

"Yes, I know you must despise me," she said; "you are wise, like my husband. You do not know what it is to long to be different from what you are, so that you may please another person; but I cannot help being weak and silly, though I hate to be so."

She hid her face in her handkerchief and sat crying silently, while she trembled from head to foot with the agitation she had gone through.

Jeanne was troubled. She did not

know what to say, but her sympathy helped her.

"Indeed, I do not think you silly," she said, gently. "The storm has been very awful, and it was worse for you than for us others, because you were alone."

Pauline gave her hand a grateful squeeze, and then, as if she feared either that Jeanne would refuse to listen, or that the precious opportunity would be snatched from her, she talked on in a hurried, excited voice.

"I love the storm now, for it has brought you to my help. I must open my heart to you. Ever since I saw you I have felt that you are the help I want. I cannot explain it; I do not understand it myself. Yes, yes,"—for Jeanne was trying to speak—"that is why I cannot bear you to despise me; because then you will not be my friend, and yet you would if you knew the joy it was to me to see you come in just now."

She paused, and looked up beseechingly at Jeanne; her dark eyes full of emotion and a bright spot of excitement on each pale cheek.

It seemed to Jeanne that all this was over-strained and unreal. She felt strangely drawn to like this pretty little nervous, loving creature; but it was absurd to imagine that she, a mere stranger, could help her.

“ Will you be my friend, and will you come and see me ? ” said Pauline, timidly, for this silence discouraged her.

Jeanne bent down and kissed her.

“ You are very kind to me,” she said, “ I shall much like to go and see you some day if you will tell me where you live.”

“ Will you come with me to-day ? ” said Pauline eagerly.

Jeanne shook her head.

“ Not to-day, thank you ; I must go home directly it leaves off raining, for my

uncle is an invalid, and this storm has no doubt alarmed him, and I am anxious at being so long away from him."

"When will you come here again?"

"That must also depend on my uncle's health; in any case I cannot come till Saturday."

"And this is Tuesday." Pauline gave a deep sigh. "Very well, then on Saturday you will come home with me. I wish you could have come to day, you would have saved me some unhappiness." Her voice was so plaintive that Jeanne was troubled.

"What could I have done?"

Pauline clasped her own small hands nervously, and bit her lip.

"It seems strange to tell you, so suddenly, and yet you cannot help me unless you know my trouble. I am not happy; I fear my—my husband has left off loving me, and I know it is my fault, and oh"—she broke down in

sudden bitter weeping—"I do not know what to do."

Jeanne was sadly perplexed.

"There is always one's priest to consult," she said shyly.

Pauline darted a quick glance at her, and then she reddened.

"Yes; but I told you it was my fault—I have given up old-fashioned ways, and now I cannot go back to them—not just yet. Tell me—I know you can tell me if you choose—how shall I win my husband back?"

Her vehemence acted upon Jeanne, and she felt interested in this strange confidence, even while she shrank from it with a kind of repulsion.

"What makes you say that I can help you? I have never been married."

Pauline looked at her with a sort of forlorn jealousy.

"I believe I am going to say something foolish—dangerous; but you are not like

other women, I can see in your face that you will not take advantage of it. It is because I feel that you are just the sort of girl that my husband would love ; just the sort of wife that I ought to be, that makes me know you can advise and help me. Ah, I know it too well."

A strange cold air seemed to pass over Jeanne ; for a moment she felt strongly repelled ; and then came the thought of Edmond, with the gladness that always warmed her heart. It doubled her pity for this poor little unloved wife.

"Are you sure," she said, "that it is not your fancy? I have heard that men show their feelings less than women do ; and they may be loving, though outwardly they are cold."

"Ah," Pauline hung her head, "I see you think I am a fond, exacting little creature, always teasing for affection ; but indeed, indeed, you are wrong. I have tried to bear this change in him

in silence, till my heart can no longer rest.”

“Have you no mother, who—” then checking herself, Jeanne said, “No, you are right. I believe it is better for your husband’s sake to tell your trouble to a stranger; but what you have told me makes me feel hardly towards him.”

“Then you must not; he is so good, so faithful, so very kind. If I were only wise and knew how to manage him he would love me, and I believe you can help me to be what he wants. When you have seen us together it will be easier for you to advise—” this was in answer to Jeanne’s look of perplexity; “but you can tell me this: Should I leave him alone when he is silent and dull, or should I try to rouse him?”

“It seems to me impossible,” said Jeanne, “that I, who am so young and inexperienced in such a matter, can

advise you. Surely you must be the best judge how to deal with your own husband."

Pauline's hands trembled with vexation.

"I tell you I have tried all sorts of ways to please him," she said, "and all fail, and now I have grown so nervous that I always say and do wrong things. You can at least say what you would do yourself."

Jeanne stood musing. Just then the clouds cleared, and the sun shone out once more. She felt that she ought to go back to Monsieur Eugène.

"I think" she said slowly, "I should just simply be myself, and leave the rest to God; it may be a trial sent to you to bear as well as you can; but it must be very hard to bear, dear." She took Pauline's hand and kissed her. "I must go now," she said, "I hope I shall be able to come on Saturday. Shall I come

to the Hospice at two o'clock? for I live some way from Dinant. I will say *au revoir*, not goodbye."

Pauline was crying so much that she could only whisper her thanks and let Jeanne go away alone, and as the girl went out into the bright sunshine her heart ached for the poor little woman. Oh, how petty her own trial in these months of separation from Edmond seemed compared with that of this unloved wife!

CHAPTER IV.

TROUBLED.

PAULINE was ashamed to let her red eyes be seen by Sister Sophie.

“She will think it was all fear of the thunder,” she said to herself; and long after Jeanne left her she sat by the open window, hoping that the fresh air would remove the tell-tale traces of her agitation. She felt relieved—happier even. She could scarcely tell why, for the only advice her new friend had offered seemed to Pauline useless.

“She does not understand,” she said, sadly. “People always judge by them-

selves when they advise, and I am quite different from her. I have no special self. I have all my life been trying to be what other people wished me to be. I don't know what my own self is." She smiled, but she still looked miserable. "I suppose I am like the creature Edmond and his cousin were talking about, which turns the colour of that which comes near it. No, I can only try to please Edmond, and I suppose this will go on till I die."

And yet she felt a new hope under her despondency. Perhaps it was the near prospect of Jeanne's visit; perhaps it was the mere relief of having poured out her pent up sorrow; but when at last she went away, she smiled cheerfully at Sister Sophie, and laughed at the remembrance of her own fears of the storm.

"I will behave better next time," she said, kissing Sister Sophie on both

cheeks. “*Au revoir* till Saturday, my sister.”

Pauline looked up at the sky; how late it was! The clouds had cleared away, and the sun was setting behind the grey crags, leaving a flood of rose colour over the grey-green river. Edmond would be coming back from Anseremme, unless he was staying to study the sunset. A sudden pang seized Pauline. Suppose he had reached home already, while she had sat thinking only of herself!

She hurried forward, forgetting that she had dreaded the meeting with her husband, for Edmond’s coldness during these last days had been more than she could bear, and this morning she had asked him if he were vexed with her. She had not ventured to do this since the day at Rimay, when her appeal had made him speak so angrily. This morning he had not been angry, he had been worse

than angry Pauline thought; he had shrugged his shoulders, and said, "No, but I shall be angry if you talk such nonsense," and then he had snatched up his hat, and had gone out without even a nod of good-bye.

Pauline had spent her morning in feeling wretched; and then, when she reached the Hospice where she usually found soothing and a change of ideas, the thunder-storm had jangled her unstrung nerves, and left her helpless. But the memory of Jeanne came like a screen between her and her morning misery. The thought of her—so young and yet so full of sympathy, and full also of that outward calmness which seems so sheltering to a weak, clinging nature—healed Pauline's wounded spirit.

When she reached home Valérie was standing at the door, chatting with a man in a blouse who was chopping faggots in the streets.

“The master is not home yet.” Valérie stood aside for her mistress to pass ; she had no intention of leaving her gossip till it was ended at this leisureful time of day. “Madame has been caught in the storm, she is very late, however—very late,” she added, in a reproving tone, as Pauline came into the passage.

Some of Pauline’s weakness came from her having been over-drilled ; she had been a mere creature of the routine of others, and Edmond was often wearied by her questions as to how she should employ her time in his absence. Perhaps nothing is so useful when one has lived in a groove as to be flung out of it. Pauline had always come in at the same hour, and now she found herself out beyond the time of Edmond’s return—beyond the usual supper hour. Why should she not go and meet Edmond ?—and then came the usual thought, would he like it ? But to-day, instead of standing perplexed, half-crying

in fretful, feverish doubt as to whether he would think it right, her thoughts went back to Jeanne's words, to the advice which at the time had sounded so impracticable—“‘I should be myself,’ Yes, she is right,” Pauline said; and then after a minute's pause on the landing, she came downstairs again, and started on the way to Anseremme.

The rose tint was fading, and a pale yellow mingled with the grey water; the cliffs were a deep, dark grey, and against the trees that were now massed in a uniform olive tint, the fast dying light gave an almost weird tone to the hue of the river as it swept away in a broad curve from the bridge where the Lesse joined it. But long before Pauline reached the bridge or the tall, dark rocks that guard the road and make a grim portal to this outlet from Dinant, she saw her husband coming towards her. He was walking slowly, and she saw that he

seemed laden ; he often left his easel and his canvas at Anseremme, but to-day he was carrying both. She forgot to be shy in her impulse to help him, and she hurried forward with sparkling eyes, and with a glow on her cheeks.

“ You here ! ” Edmond said, in a surprised voice. “ No, no, these are too heavy for you. You may take the camp-stool if you like. Why did you come ? ” he added.

Pauline felt nervous again ; but she was eager to tell her story.

“ I must tell you I have had an adventure,” she said. “ I came home only a short time ago. I was at the Hospice during the thunder storm. You were not out in it, were you, darling ? ” She felt the coat-sleeve nearest her.

“ No,” he said, kindly ; “ I took my picture into shelter, so I escaped the rain ; but I hoped, little one, you would not have

gone out when the sky looked so threatening ; and thunder frightens you, I know."

Pauline's heart seemed to leap with joy. He did think of her then, and care for her safety ; she felt very happy. Formerly she would have thanked him effusively, but now she checked herself.

" Yes, dear," she said, " I was very much frightened; indeed, I do not know how I could have borne it much longer; but Jeanne was with me and did me good."

Edmond started, but he turned away his face.

" Who was with you ?" His sharp tone frightened her. " Whom are you talking about ?" he said, irritably.

" My new friend whom I meet at the Hospice ; I have spoken to you of her ; Mademoiselle de Matagne."

" But you called her—something else."

He could not say the word Jeanne to his wife, but he waited in intense suspense for her answer.

"Yes, she is Jeanne. Do you not remember I told you about her? I said she was just the woman you would admire —tall and full of dignity, so quiet, and her face so pale and noble, and yet with such loving brown eyes. What is it, darling?" she cried, in alarm, for it seemed to her that Edmond gasped and shivered as if he felt sudden pain.

"Nothing, nothing—only one of these foolish stones hurt my foot."

Pauline was too full of her story to be very observing.

"Well, do you know—you will hardly believe it—but she really cares for me, and she is coming to see us on Saturday." She waited, but he did not speak. "Well, what do you say? You said I might ask her, Edmond."

There was a fretful sound in her voice that roused him. He turned round and looked at Pauline. Good Heavens ! what a fool he was to dream of such a chance ! Was it likely or possible that anything so fortuitous could possibly happen as a friendship between his wife and Jeanne Lahaye ? Why, Jeanne was as common a name as could be met with ; and how could he trust to Pauline's description ?

But his wife's appealing eyes told him she must be answered.

" Yes, of course, why should she not come ? it will be less lonely for you if she comes and sits with you."

" Ah, but I want you to see her," and yet as she said the words a keen pang of jealousy stirred in Pauline. Suppose Jeanne was really a woman that Edmond would admire, was she quite wise in bringing them together ; just now, when

her own hold over her husband seemed to have slackened?

"That must be as it happens ;" he spoke carelessly, but he felt sure that he should not try to see this new friend of his wife's.

Pauline was as happy as a bird. Edmond was not displeased, and she felt sure that when he did see Jeanne he would like her ; and meantime—ah, meantime—her new friend would teach her all she wanted to know, and she would begin life over again. She prattled on as she walked beside Edmond, without noticing his utter silence, till they reached the beginning of the street.

"I am going in here" he said—they were passing a saddler's—"to get my camp-stool mended. I will be in by the time supper is ready."

Valérie was still at the door, and she noted the change in her mistress's face. She had been lately in trouble about

Pauline ; now she supposed Monsieur Dupuis had been pleased because his wife went to meet him.

“She spoiled him to begin with,” the sharp-eyed servant said, “and now he’s got tired of it.” However, she decided that they had “made it up” this evening, or Madame Dupuis would not have looked so gay or run upstairs so lightly.

“She and Mademoiselle Elise do not have so much to say to one another as they had,” Valérie thought, and the idea was pleasant. She could not make Vidonze’s housekeeper out, and it seemed to her that Mademoiselle was hardly good enough company for her young lady, as she still called Pauline.

But Pauline’s gaiety was soon checked ; Edmond was silent all supper-time. As soon as the meal was over, and he had lit his cigar, he took up a book which lay on Pauline’s work-table, and began to read.

She felt chilled and disappointed, but she strove hard against the fretfulness which had so often driven Edmond away from her when one of these silent fits possessed him. She began to knit, glancing every now and then at her husband to see if his eyes were fixed on his book.

By degrees her thoughts strayed to her new friend. She went over all that Jeanne had said to her, and then all that she had gleaned from Sister Sophie about her other “angel,” as the Sister called her. It was a delicious reverie, with hope at the end of it; for might she not now count on frequent meetings with her friend? All at once her thoughts broke into words.

“ Is it not strange, Edmond, dearest, how names suit people? There is your cousin at Namur, he must be a Jules; he could not be anyone else; and my Jeanne is quite like her name, she looks like a

heroine—like Jeanne d'Albret—a woman made to rule others."

Edmond moved uneasily. He had made an excuse for leaving his wife at the saddler's to escape hearing this name repeated ; he longed to rush away and walk for miles, so that he might try to quiet the tumult Pauline's talk had raised, but he could not do this. He had been so particular in his directions about the mending of his camp-stool that the good Dinantais Monsieur Freyr smiled and thought Monsieur Dupuis was making a great fuss about nothing. Through supper Edmond had felt too irritable to talk, and now he had not been reading, as Pauline thought ; he had been schooling himself for having allowed an absurd, an unreal fancy to take hold of his mind, the fancy that this might be Jeanne. It showed that he was in a morbid state, and that his cousin was right when he said he wanted

a thorough change. Why should he not take Pauline to Italy? One of his fellow artists at Anseremme was going to winter in Rome for the sake of study, and his mother was to accompany him. It would not be dull for Pauline; he could leave her with this lady while he visited Florence and other artist haunts, and he should be free. Free—his heart seemed to feel light at the prospect. Somehow it had seemed to him lately that away from Pauline he might indulge in thoughts which beside her were unlawful. He took his cigar from his mouth and closed his eyes, while he gazed at the pictures that rose before him. He saw himself travelling alone, with no one to consider; free to go and free to stay where he pleased, enjoying undreamed of beauties of art and nature; for it would be possible, he thought, to stay in Italy till summer time. Just then Pauline's words roused him, but he only heard distinctly the word Jeanne.

"Eh, what do you say? I beg your pardon," and he looked as if he had just wakened.

She repeated her sentence.

"Well," he said, smiling, "everyone to his taste. I do not admire female rulers. I suppose other men do not either; you generally find that strong-minded women are left single, little one."

Pauline rested her cheek in one little hand.

"I suppose I have not described her well," she said, pensively; "but I am sure my Jeanne is just the woman a man would like to marry. She is strong—yes, but it seems to be more to help others than to rule them. My idea of a strong-minded woman is more like—" she dropped her voice to a whisper—"Mademoiselle Elise, you know. Now my Jeanne's soft, sweet brown eyes could never look fierce, and she has lovely wavy gold brown hair. Oh, if she did

not look so clever she would do for a Madonna!"'

Edmond started, and then let his cigar fall. By the time he had picked it up he was able to answer Pauline.

"You must never judge by the outside, you silly child; why, it is supposed that the most wicked heroine in Shakespeare had fair hair and blue eyes."

He looked at his watch. "Do you know that it is very late? you will destroy your eyes if you sit knitting at this time of night."

"Yes, Edmond dear," she said meekly,
"I am going to bed."

CHAPTER V.

A MEETING.

TO Jeanne's real, simple nature, early trained by the rebuffs of Madame Delimoy to subdue an outward show of feeling, Pauline's passionate outburst had seemed like acting. Such utter self-betrayal had evoked no real sympathy from Jeanne, though it had moved her to a warm pity for this poor, helpless woman. But now relieved from the shy restraint which such an attack on her reserve had created, Jeanne's deep tenderness asserted itself; and she was full of self-reproach.

"Dear little thing," she said, "how lovingly and unselfishly she spoke of her husband! It is all for his sake, and he must be worthless, or he would love such a pretty, dainty creature; she is like a bit of rare china, and yet so animated, not like some dolls of pretty women I have seen. It was like my *gaucherie*," she laughed at herself, "to be cold and stiff; because I could not have behaved in such a way myself I almost fancied it wrong, or at least strange, in her. If I can only help her how glad I shall be! I can at least pray for her."

Pauline would have been gladdened if she had seen the love for her that shone in Jeanne's eyes; but she was soon to be banished from her new friend's thoughts. For sadness greeted Jeanne when she reached home. The storm had brought on a convulsive nervous attack, and Monsieur Eugène was still so ill that the doctor had not left him.

Presently the doctor came out of the sick-room. He soothed Jeanne's alarm by telling her there was no danger, only that Monsieur Eugène must be kept very quiet, and he must not travel as soon as he had intended; he also wished him to try a course of the mineral baths on the other side of the river.

Jeanne asked if she should summon Monsieur Raoul. It was a great relief to hear that there was no occasion for this.

"Monsieur must not be excited in any way," said the little doctor; "only keep him quiet, and he will do; for the rest, let him lead his usual life as if nothing had happened."

Jeanne was glad to escape Monsieur Raoul's visit; she was glad too that they were to stay on in this pleasant place; but still she was anxious about her dear old friend. She found him looking pale and exhausted, but he was eager to know how she escaped the thunderstorm. He

grew interested in hearing about Pauline, and his old fear that Jeanne must find life dull showed itself.

"I am glad you have found a friend of your own sex. You must go and see this lady often, my child. She is better company for you than a poor old invalid."

Jeanne shook her head at him. "No, no, uncle," she said, "I am never dull."

But on Friday, when he drove into Dinant to begin his course of baths, he insisted that she should go with him, and call on her new friend.

"I do not know where to find her," said Jeanne. He was sorry, but he said that she must amuse herself in the little town till it was time for him to return.

"There are some public gardens," he said; "the doctor has told me about them, and he says from them

you can climb to the cliff above the town."

Jeanne nodded and smiled, but it occurred to her that, if she had to spend some hours in waiting, she should not employ them in mounting the cliff. She had never lived in a town since her childhood, and the shop-windows of Dinant had looked very tempting in her hurried visit, for except when she came to church she had only once crossed the bridge since they had come to live at the Château.

She resolved to do some shopping, and she hoped that, by studying the shop-windows, she might learn a little of the mysteries of fashion ; for simple as Jeanne was she thought she would like to dress as much like other women as possible by the time she met Edmond Dupuis, and she might meet him any day if he still lived near Namur. Her heart beat quickly, and time flew by rapidly while she stood

gazing, dreaming of coming happiness. At last she went into a draper's shop, and made her purchases; but still she had an hour to wait. She wished she knew where Madame Pauline lived, so that she could have gone to see her. Perhaps it would please Monsieur Eugène if she went into the Public Gardens. To go there she must pass the photograph shop, and Jeanne could not help lingering here to see if there were any fresh views in the window. But she turned away when she saw looking through the glass-door within the dark face of the tall woman who had sold her the view of the cottage beside the Meuse.

"Surely," she thought, "I have seen her before;" and she felt a repulsion from this remarkable-looking woman.

All at once there came to her a strange thrill of expectancy, and she looked up, the

uncertainty of the present faded away, and the joy of her past youth flooded over her, dazzling her with its radiance—for there was Edmond coming towards her.

He did not see her; his eyes were cast down; but Jeanne did not wait for his recognition. Long ago she had told herself she owed him an atonement. A warm flush spread over her face as she went forward.

"At last," she said, and she put her hand gently on his arm.

He saw her and drew back; he grew white as if he were going to faint.

"I was too sudden," Jeanne's voice faltered. "I have startled you."

And then her sweet brown eyes met his, and he saw how full they were of ardent love for him. He clasped her hands in his for an instant, passionately—then he recollected himself.

"We cannot talk in the middle of the

street." His lips quivered with agitation.
"Come down here."

Just beyond the photograph shop a little alley, with high blank walls on each side, vine sprays falling over here and there, went down to the river. Jeanne followed him, feeling as if she scarcely trod on earth. She was in a dream of ecstasy.

Edmond went on till the lane turned, so that they could not be seen from the street they had quitted. Then, before she could speak, he began vehemently.

"Jeanne, it is not my fault; it is you who have done it all. Why did you give me up? Why did you not at least answer my letter—my God, it is too hard to bear this."

He had let go her hands as he turned into the little alley, but now he snatched at them feverishly, and stood gazing at her with the miserable yearning with which a man might gaze on a dying, well-loved

wife. And then, as he looked into her pure, noble face, and saw the ineffable tenderness that longed to comfort the grief she saw in his, a calm stole upon him; for one brief moment Jeanne's sway over his nature so mastered him that it seemed as if even out of this depth of darkness she could lift them both into light.

Jeanne did not draw her hands away; but Edmond was too absorbed to heed this.

“I was wrong, I know, Edmond,” the girl said, “and I have so longed to tell you. I had to obey grandmother, but I ought to have thought more of you—forgive me; I have been punished—and now it is over.” She gave him one of the half shy, half arch glances from under her downcast lashes that had once been his dear delight. Ah, how well he remembered, and how each familiar tone and gesture roused him almost to madness!

But he could not speak, he only held her hands and gazed feverishly in her face.

“Edmond” she said timidly, I believe, when I wrote that letter for grandmother, I thought you would come to me for another answer.”

“Another answer to my letter to you,” he burst out. “Oh, Jeanne, this is coquetry ; this is worse than I thought. What more could I say ? I had poured out my soul in words that I almost feared might frighten you. I told you I could not live without you ; that on you depended all my hopes, and without you I must go to ruin ; and you could coldly wait the chance of my coming to repeat all this at your feet. Cold, selfish girl ! ”

She pressed the hands that still held hers, and his wandering, despairing eyes fixed again on her face.

“Cold ! ” that was all she said.

The word seemed flung back at him

by those glowing, love-fraught eyes—
by the panting breath that came quickly
through those parted, trembling lips.

“ You wrote—I had no letter, Edmond,”
at last the words broke forth in a des-
pairing cry ; “ you wrote to grandmother,
not to me. Ah, you did write then ? ”
as he bowed his head she looked at
him with tender eyes, then drawing her
hands away, she clasped them fondly
round his arm,—“ my poor Edmond,
how you have been made to suffer !
Hush ! she is dead, and she thought it
was for my good.”

She stopped, for the misery in his
eyes startled her. She began to rouse
to a consciousness that something was
amiss, something she did not under-
stand, and, letting her hands fall, she
drew timidly a little more away from
her lover. “ But all our unhappiness
is over now,” she said, with a sigh of
relief.

"Yes, you are right; all is over with us," he said, gloomily.

Jeanne flushed. Did he mean that she had offended past forgiveness? But she loved him too dearly to let him go away in anger.

"I cannot tell you what I feel," she said. "All these months, I must have seemed so ungrateful—so wicked; but you will forgive me now, dear Edmond, when you know that I never had that precious letter."

He stood looking at her with despair in his eyes.

"Edmond," her voice trembled, "you cannot be really angry with me; all this time I have been longing—hoping to see you. I—I—" she grew rosy red again and her eyes drooped—"I have never left off loving you, and I told Mademoiselle de Matagne that if ever you wanted me I must leave her, for I had vowed to myself to be yours only."

"Are you mad?" he broke in, hoarsely, "or do you want me to be mad? You know that I am bound—separated from you far more than by absence."

Then the terrible change in her face alarmed him; for Jeanne looked like a statue. A grey shade had stolen over her face; a film came over the brightness of her eyes, and her arms fell down straight on each side of the tall, still body.

Her tongue was fixed too, and her dry lips opened widely. Horror had come to her, the foreshadowing of that which she felt she was going to hear. In an instant he had come close to her, his arm was round her, for he feared she would fall, but Jeanne dared not let herself lean against him, the horror held her still.

"Oh, my darling!" and for the first time Jeanne heard the same accent in the voice that had wooed her beside the

river, "what is it? what has frightened you, my Jeanne?"

A great temptation swept over Edmond. She did not know, and why should he tell her? why should he kill this one joy which had burst into his miserable life? why should he destroy her new-found happiness? She must know afterwards, but who could grudge them these few minutes of bliss? why should he not have the ecstasy of hearing her love from her own lips?

She drew herself from him very slowly and sadly.

"Do not be cruel," she said, simply; "did you mean what you said just now? are you promised to some one else, Edmond?" For she had not yet guessed his marriage.

His face grew dark, he would not meet her eyes. Again he tried to take her hands, but Jeanne drew still farther away.

" You are cold and cruel, Jeanne," he said. " I have never loved anyone but you ;" but her eyes were fixed on his, as if she would compel the truth. " A marriage without love is no marriage," he said ; the words were forced out of him against his will.

Jeanne shivered from head to foot.

" You are married."

There was no question in her voice, the words sounded more like an accusation.

For, indeed, Jeanne could hardly believe that this idol of her dreams, this man to whom she still clung with such passionate tenderness, could have so soon forgotten her for another woman.

" Did I not tell you you had made our misery ? but you must listen to me, Jeanne."

" I cannot, I ought not to have listened so long—all is indeed over between us. Let me pass," she added sternly, for he

tried to stop her—and turning away, she hastened up the alley into the busy street.

She went on fast to the public gardens ; she had met Elise Herkenne face to face as she came out of the alley, but she did not see her ; nor did she see that the tall dark woman went slowly a few steps down it, stopped, and then walked on to where Edmond Dupuis was standing.

CHAPTER VI.

EDMOND'S RESOLUTION.

MADÉMOISELLE HERKENNE had that perfect manner of walking only to be seen in a tall and well-made woman ; with her head well poised, her whole body moving in concert, her well-gloved hand gathering her skirt into graceful drapery, she went swiftly down the steep alley. She came opposite Edmond Dupuis before he had recovered from the confusion in which Jeanne had left him.

The sight of Elise roused him to alarm, though not to full recollection. She

smiled and passed him with a slight nod. Edmond looked after her, and sighed with a sense of relief. He had been on the point of asking her not to tell Pauline of his meeting with Jeanne Lahaye if she had not passed so swiftly.

Good Heavens ! was he losing his senses ? Probably she had not seen the meeting, and how could Mademoiselle Herkenne know anything about Jeanne, and what could she have seen to create remark ? Nothing.

He forgot that he had come back from Anseremme to inquire for his camp-stool ; his mind was in a whirl ; he went up into the town, and then, crossing the Place, took his way beside the Meuse towards the little village of Leff.

His head was burning, and he longed to bathe it in the cool water flowing beside him ; but this was impossible, and when he reached the tall red chimney, which mars the view in this direction, he

turned mechanically to the right, and took the road that led into the valley of the Leff.

It was quiet enough here; there was nothing to keep away the terrible thoughts which distracted him.

Jeanne's parting look had torn a veil from his sight, had shown him the brink on which he had stood. What was he? A perjured traitor, faithless to these two women who both loved him so fondly. He shrank from even naming them together. He had not sinned against Pauline, she—the generous part of Edmond's nature shrank from owning it, but still it remained as a fact which he strove not to remember—she had wooed him. He had not promised her his love, only his liking; and he had fulfilled his bargain, he was blameless towards her.

“She must have known that if my heart had been free I should not have

said that," he thought, angrily. " She is not, therefore, wronged if I find my love more than I can resist."

Yes, he had a right to despise Pauline—and mentally he smothered her image with the fumes of his anger, while his thoughts flew back to Jeanne. But Jeanne's face, her smile, the love he had seen in those true sweet eyes, brought him to chaos again—his reason seemed to be leaving him.

He had got beyond the straggling houses nestled under the crags that overhung the Fonds de Leff, and he flung himself face downwards on a bank beside the road.

Amid all the bitter longing of these months, there had been the conviction that Jeanne could not reproach him; she had cast him off, and she had scorned too his passionate confession of love.

Father Hallez had shaken his belief

in the girl's coldness, and had made him shrink from Pauline as he had never shrunk before. In these last days his eyes had seemed to open afresh to her silliness, to her weak, teasing anxiety to conform to his wishes ; even the pretty smiling face that had once pleased his fancy had irritated him ; he had told himself he hated prettiness. Pauline had guessed truly, though not fully, how impossible it was for her husband to love her. And now all doubt was rent away—Jeanne had always loved him.

He lay face downwards, for some time immovable. and then a deep groan burst from him.

“ Oh, God ! ” he said, “ hell cannot be worse than this ! ”

He rose up and walked on deeper into the valley, trying to flee from his agony, for he felt tortured. To hear her love spoken by Jeanne, and to feel like Tantalus,

so near, and yet so powerless to possess it. He walked on rapidly, he made no effort to calm or subdue the torrent that was pouring in upon his soul—breaking down all the old bulwarks of early training and habits of thought.

Jeanne had been faultless then, for the letter she wrote had plainly been against her will, and she had never read his loving words. She had loved him all this time—while he had been, as he thought, wasting love on an idea—she had been waiting, longing, for his presence. And now! what a traitor he must be in her eyes! She knew nothing, but the fact of his marriage, none of the excuse for it, and he had been fool enough to let her go away without explanation. He had not even said, “I do not love my wife” his conduct to Jeanne must have seemed to her an insult.

His pace slackened at last, he had exhausted himself; hitherto he had hurried on unconscious of surroundings; now his attention was roused by something that was happening in the road before him, and he almost mechanically stopped. A mountain ash grew on the cliff-side, and a boy about eight years old had clambered up the steep rock, and, clinging to the stem of the ash, was struggling to break off bunches of its rich orange fruit. Below stood a little delicate girl, her fair curly head thrown back, her eyes bright with expectation, holding up her brown apron with both hands.

“Stand nearer, Berthe, foolish that you are,” the boy called from the tree; “if they are not caught they will be bruised, and I shall not care to have them; do you hear, Berthe?”

She gave him such a loving look.

“I will try, yes, yes, I will try;” and

just then, as she rushed forward a heavy bunch of berries struck her on the face.

She did not cry out, but when Edmond went up to her he heard a little choked sob of pain, and tears streamed from her eyes.

" You are hurt," he said ; " let go your apron ; he must wait."

" Ah—bah !" said the boy, " it is her fault for being so awkward," and he came down sulkily from the tree.

" Little brute," Edmond thought, as he saw that Berthe still held fast her apron with some berries in it.

After a few steps he looked back. The boy's arms were round the girl, and he was wiping her eyes with her apron, while the berries lay unheeded in the road.

Edmond turned back again, and smiled as he passed the children ; the little scene had quieted him, and con-

science got a chance of being listened to.

Was it not best to have parted with Jeanne thus hastily—would it not be safer for himself, kinder to Jeanne if he never saw her again? For the time his good angel triumphed. He told himself that life could not last for ever, and that he would try to live it patiently with Pauline. It would be misery, but it would be an atonement to Jeanne for his faithlessness.

He walked on, his head erect now, for he felt himself a sort of martyr; his self-reproach was appeased. He resolved to go home, and be kinder to his wife than he had been since that fatal day at Rimay. Perhaps something in the quiet endurance of little Berthe in the valley had touched his heart, and made him more pitiful towards his wife. Certainly he was strong in good intentions when he reached the street leading to his home.

As he went in he saw through the glass door that Pauline was talking eagerly to Mademoiselle Herkenne. The sight jarred him; he had told his wife that if she wished to talk to her former governess, she must ask her to come upstairs, as he did not choose his wife to be seen in the shop by the constant customers of the photographer; for, although Vidonze had made no portraits at Dinant, the beautiful views he had taken in the neighbourhood and throughout the Ardennes had found ready purchasers.

Before he had reached the landing, Pauline came hurrying after him.

"How nice of you to come home so early!" she said; then, conscious that she had been doing what he did not like, she came timidly up to him. "I met Elise in the street and I just went in to finish our talk; I was telling her about my friend, dearest; and what do you think she says?"

"How can I tell!" He flung himself into a chair, but he looked strangely troubled.

"She says," Pauline went on, "that she is sure Jeanne will not come home with me to-morrow. She says too that she has seen her."

"Where did she see? Here?" He spoke quickly, and Pauline looked surprised.

"She has bought photographs here; but it is unkind of Elise to say that she will not come home with me. You think Jeanne will come, do you not, darling?"

She stood close to him, looking down into his face as if she were waiting for her sentence. But Edmond left it to fate and to Jeanne to answer Pauline.

"How can I tell? wait till to-morrow comes," he said. "There is a concert to-night at the Casino, shall we go there?"

She clapped her hands with delight.

"Oh yes—How kind of you! I have been so wishing to go. Which

gown would you like me to wear,
dearest?"

"Whichever you please my friend."

But he did not say it in the cold, dull tone which had so often made her heart ache. He told himself that he had to bear with her, and that it would be better in every way to do it well than badly.

Later on in the evening, as he strolled about with Pauline listening to the music which sounded so sweet among the trees of the gardens, lights twinkling here and there through the leaves, he began to wonder about this to-morrow to which his wife looked forward so ardently. Would Jeanne come in ignorance, or would she guess that Pauline was his wife? for he was sure that Pauline's friend was Jeanne Lahaye. He felt sure also that she would never run the risk of meeting him in the presence of Pauline.

Then, as he anticipated the disappoint-

ment in store for the foolish, fond little woman, he felt utterly weary—he should have to go through her regrets with her, to seem unconscious all the while, and to affect to share her vexation.

“Heaven knows,” he thought, “that will not be new to me. I do not think I have ever really felt spontaneously with Pauline since we have been married; it has never occurred to me to care for her opinion or to try to share it. I suppose this is because she has cared so much for mine, poor little creature.”

Just now he was painfully sensible of this want of sympathy. Pauline was as gay as possible, admiring everything, talking even while the music went on—while her husband’s heart grew heavier, and his outlook on life seemed more dreary than ever. It was a relief to him when they got home to hear Pauline say that she was tired, and that she should go to bed at once.

Edmond went into the sitting-room and sat there in darkness. He did not smoke, he felt too miserable even for that solace. He had done his duty, and what was the result? he was even more miserable than he had been in Fonds de Leff. There was no sound in the street below to disturb his thoughts, everyone had gone to bed, even at the café opposite the lights were all put out—and only the glimmer of the infrequent street-lamps came fitfully into the room.

He had sat thus a long time without moving, without consciously thinking—not sleeping, yet so exhausted in body and mind that he felt no power of moving; all at once the dull apathy lifted.

If he must lead this life, submit patiently to this fate that had overtaken him, at least he need not live under the weight of Jeanne's contempt; he would do himself justice in her eyes. He must see her again and tell her the truth about his

marriage ; tell her that as in marrying he had reserved to himself the right to love, he might go on loving her ; but he would be calm in saying all this, there should not be a word or a look that could trouble her pure soul or alarm her into flight.

He reddened with shame as he remembered his ungoverned passion to-day, and he felt that Jeanne too would remember it, and would shrink from meeting him again. But it must be, he must see her, and his sanguine nature once more asserted itself. Jeanne would not refuse him a last farewell, if he asked it of her. She was too large-hearted, too generous, to shrink from it because it would be painful to herself.

“ I will see her once more ; there is strength in her very presence ; it will be agony to part again, and yet there is joy even in this agony.”

CHAPTER VII.

IN REVOLT.

NO one seeing Jeanne cross the street would have guessed that the blossom of her life had just been rudely severed from the stalk, and left to wither. Outwardly she was quiet and self-restrained, and while they were driving home she listened to Monsieur Eugène's account of the invigorating effects of his bath with attentive interest. But before his account was ended, the invalid's sympathetic eyes had noted her extreme paleness.

" You are tired, my Jeanne. I will go

alone next time, or else you must not wait for me. The doctor says I am to take the baths twice a week."

Jeanne's attention had wandered.

"Uncle," she said earnestly, "need we stay here much longer? do you not think we must be wanted at Château Montcour? it is so very long since we left it."

Monsieur Eugène was surprised, almost vexed.

"But, my child, do you not understand —the doctor has said, 'if the baths suit, you must give them a chance; take a dozen, or twenty.' Why, Jeanne," he said, fretfully, "you know you said how much better it would be to wait until I grew stronger before I went back to Montcour."

Jeanne looked at him dreamily; how long ago it seemed since she had said these words! Was she really the same Jeanne, in the same life in which she had said only this morning she felt so glad

to stay longer at Dinant? She forgot all about her new friendship; all feeling had been paralysed by the one fact that had suddenly come into her life.

"Yes," she said, answering Monsieur Eugène; "oh yes, I remember."

She was glad that he left off talking; so glad when the carriage stopped before the entrance door, and she was free to go to her own room.

She took off her bonnet, and then sat down. She was very tired, mentally and bodily. She had no more fight to make; sorrow might have its turn now.

"Married," she said, and the word seemed to wring her heart. "Oh, my Edmond, must I leave off loving you!"

Tears would not come; the full heart felt like stone. Not even a sob escaped her. She sat quite still. Once again she said, "My Edmond," with intense tenderness and then she sat silent, her head drooped forward on her breast,

large tears falling down her cheeks. She was crushed under the weight of her trial. There was an added bitterness in it; it had been truly, as Edmond had said, her own fault. She had written wrongly in refusing to marry him, without at the same time explaining the reason of her conduct. Looking back across all these months, the little reasons against this course then so real, faded away, and she saw only how lightly in seeming she had treated Edmond's love. She tried not to think harshly of her grandmother, but, with all her dutifulness, Jeanne was too upright not to abhor the deceit and mistrust that had been shown towards her. The next minute she tried to make excuse.

"She might have meant me to know it later," she said; "the last words she spoke that night were to bid me put my letter ready for the postman."

A sudden light had come to Jeanne. She could no longer understand her own

silence after her grandmother died. If she had written at once and told Edmond she was free, he would have come to her—and then—Jeanne writhed as she thrust the idea from her—the bliss that might have been hers. She went over that sad time, finding no excuse for her silence. She could not blame Edmond. He had not been faithless to her. If he had been faithless to his own heart, well, then, so had she.

“Love is not a dead thing,” she said, passionately; it shows that it lives by acts. How was it possible for him to know I loved him when no one but I knew it?” But she stopped at this. Two persons, both of whom she held in high reverence, had known her secret, and yet neither of them had advised her to write to her lover—Father Hallez and Mademoiselle de Matagne. It was true that her friend on her death-bed had said something to Jeanne of her intention of seeking out Edmond. She

could not tell the girl that both she and Monsieur Hallez had thought it singular and ominous that Monsieur Dupuis had not come in search of Jeanne: for to neither of them had it seemed possible that he had not heard of the death of Madame Delimoy.

But there was yet a most terrible side to her anguish, she knew that it was balm to her heart that he still loved her. She tried to say to herself, it would have been much better if he had cast away all thought of her, and had given his full love to his wife—she could not say this.

Jeanne rose to her feet in horror; but it was no use. She could not conquer the longing for Edmond's love. There was no use in telling herself she had refused it; it was no longer hers, and therefore it was unlawful, sinful even, to covet it.

“He loves me—well, I do not care,” she said, passionately; “he will never know it, nor that woman either—I will

love him too; his love is mine. I am not giving my thoughts up to a man who loves some one else, that would be base; but this—well, if this comforts me, it hurts no one but me.” She walked up and down, up and down—she could only move, she could not think.

But, though the tumult lasted long enough to leave deep marks of its presence, at last the inevitable re-action came. It was impossible that, trained as she had been, first so piously by her mother and the good convent sisters, and then to such entire self-restraint as had been enforced by the mere society of Madame Delimoy, Jeanne should at once free herself from the second nature which had become habitual.

She sank down on her knees and prayed, but though the effort brought tears, it did not bring soothing. She felt that religion, prayer, every good practice of her life, had become burdensome

because each one set a barrier between her and her love. She rose up suddenly.

“It is a mockery, I cannot do it; how can I pray to God when my heart is full of Edmond and the longing to be with him?”

Her wish for solitude had fled, and she hurried downstairs to try to rid herself of those faint yet importunate whispers that kept on in a far-off phantom-like way telling her she was wrong.

But she found no relief in change of scene, life had lost all colour for Jeanne; the very strength which had helped her courage in the patient waiting through these months of suspense, now only served to deepen the force of her love; and Jeanne had not known how she loved till, face to face, she had confessed her love to Edmond; then the bud had developed, opened itself into a rapidly expanding flower, the glow had spread through every nerve and fibre, and left the whole

woman, though she strove to hide it, palpitating with love. There had been time for this development before she learned her doom; and though the shock had chilled her ecstasy, and had for the time overwhelmed her, yet love lived on, hungering for a fuller taste of the joy so suddenly dashed away as soon as tasted.

When she came downstairs and sought Monsieur Eugène, she found him dull and absorbed; even when she spoke to him he seemed to be thinking of something else, and answered at random. Yet, if she had been less self-occupied, she would have seen those timid blue eyes follow her as she moved restlessly about, with a look that would have puzzled her. It seemed as if Monsieur Eugène wanted advice or help from Jeanne, and that he was too timid to ask it.

And truly he had a purpose he wished to lay before her. His sensitive nature felt the trouble in hers; he thought in

his ignorance that, all unknown to herself, Jeanne's life was suffering from her enforced seclusion with him, and he was trying to nerve himself to prevent this.

But evening came, and yet he had not found courage to speak; though Jeanne stayed with him later than usual, for she dreaded being left alone to face her thoughts.

When she reached her room, for the first time since her meeting with Edmond, she remembered her promise to go home with Pauline. It seemed to her impossible to do this; by going into Dinant she would run the risk of seeing him again, for her new friend had said that she lived on the other side of the river.

"I must meet her at the Hospice instead," she said; she had not realised how ardently her visit was desired by Pauline. In Jeanne's over-wrought condition this new acquaintance seemed so trifling,

she could scarcely give a thought to it.

She had dreaded the night . . . but, almost as soon as she lay down, sleep came to her. At first heavy and stupor-like, but after a while, troubled with distorted dreams, from which she only wakened partially, to believe with opened eyes that her visions were true, and then to fall asleep again, and rouse in feverish unrest. Towards morning she again slept heavily, and it was late when she awakened ; when she came down she found Monsieur Eugène in the garden. He was sitting on a bench beside the river, reading his newspaper, and when he saw Jeanne he held her out a letter.

“Good day, my child, this is a new correspondent, is it not?” he glanced with a sort of childish curiosity at the address. “Such a pretty, neat writing !”

“Yes, it is unknown to me.”

Jeanne sat down beside him. At first she had felt sick, so sure did it seem that

the letter was from Edmond Dupuis, but the hand-writing had quieted this fear; she opened it and read the first page.

“ My Dear Jeanne,

“ For I must call you Jeanne—you can never be anything else to me—I have been counting the hours till Saturday, and I am writing to ask you if you will not mind staying till five, or later; my husband is away every day painting, and he cannot be home till towards evening as he must not give up any daylight time. I so long for him and you to meet, and if you think it too late to go home after, my maid shall go with you; only I write because you said your uncle was an invalid, and I thought he might be nervous if you were late.”—Here Jeanne turned the page and read no more, for she saw distinctly in much larger writing than the rest, the signature,

“ PAULINE DUPUIS.”

CHAPTER VIII.

FRUITLESS.

ELISE HERKENNE was far more than perplexed. She had watched and schemed all day, and now it was evening and yet no light had come to help her; not the slightest clue as to how she could benefit by the discovery she had made. For she had made a discovery, or rather had seen that her suspicion was rightly founded. As she stood watching Jeanne, she saw her meet Edmond Dupuis, and then, as the girl turned to follow him down the alley, Elise saw her face. The sight was an intense relief. Elise clapped her

hands in vehement exultation, she could have danced in the mad joy she felt.

“ She loves him, she loves him. I knew it; I felt it. Oh, what joy !”

She wept passionately; she felt as a prisoner feels when, after a lapse of months, light and liberty are given him without warning that they are so near. There was no obstacle now between her and Vidonze, for, she thought, he would not go on seeking Jeanne if her love for another could be proved. But how was this love to be made known to Vidonze, without betraying the presence of Jeanne in Dinant?

For the present Elise crushed down her passionate joy by her iron will. She must make sure of what she had seen. She had quickly put on her bonnet and crept quietly down the alley, close against the wall, so that she had remained hidden when the lovers—as she called them—had passed the bend, and then, craning her long neck forward, she had

heard, not all, but enough to assure her she had not judged hastily. She crept back again, and when Jeanne came up the passage Elise noted her white face and rigid manner; then she went out to look for Edmond. Mademoiselle Herkenne smiled to herself when she had passed him. He looked so struck with despair, almost fit to destroy himself.

“What a pair of fools they are!” she said; “with some women it might be difficult, but not with such a baby as Pauline. Why need they be so disturbed? Perhaps one can understand that the girl is unhappy, but I should have thought better of Edmond Dupuis; he married with his eyes open.”

And then she shrugged her shoulders. No, she remembered now that Vidonze had laughed about Edmond Dupuis, and had called him too soft; a man who at Namur had gone to mass with his wife sometimes; it was possible that

this priggishness might make Edmond scrupulous about seeking Jeanne. Mademoiselle Herkenne hated what she called "good people." Then before she had half thought the puzzle out, Pauline had met her, all eagerness to talk of her new friend. This made a fresh item in Elise's score against Jeanne Lahaye, for, even besides the certainty her quick wits gave her that Pauline's friend and Jeanne were identical, the name De Matagne settled all doubt; Vidonze had specially mentioned it in his letter. Elise did not care for Pauline's affection, she told herself she had always despised it, and yet she felt painfully jealous as she listened to the little woman's praise of her new friend. For a moment she was strongly tempted to tell Pauline of the meeting she had witnessed, and then she paused; such a revelation would probably end the whole affair. Pauline would appeal to Jeanne to spare her, and Edmond

would give up his old love. No, a far better way would be to do all she could to bring Edmond and Jeanne once more together.

"I know; I know how it will be," she said, forgetting all her previous theory about Jeanne; "she ran away from him this morning, but that was the first time; she will get over that, and if she really loves him she will have no peace till she sees him again."

And when she saw Edmond take his wife out that evening, she told herself matters were going as she wished. She remembered scornfully that her own false lover had rarely been so kind to her as at their last meeting, when he knew that he meant to desert her.

"Edmond Dupuis has made up his mind," she said; "he is not going to give up Jeanne, and for that reason Pauline will have no cause for complaint for some time to come."

But still she was troubled; she could not see how all this would affect Antoine Vidonze.

It was like a game of chess—every move she contemplated involved a risk which she knew was full of danger. Vidonze's love would be increased tenfold by the sight of Jeanne, and yet, unless he saw Jeanne and Edmond together, how could their love be proved to him?

Of late she had in her own lofty way pitied Pauline for her husband's evident neglect; but, in the keen interest she felt in Edmond's success with Jeanne, she lost all feeling of sympathy for the poor little wife. She knew where Jeanne lived, and she might tell Edmond; but there was this danger; if he did anything rash Jeanne might take alarm, and go back to her village; and Elise believed that Antoine would soon hear of her return there. There was one way, but that was beyond her most sanguine hopes—for it involved a

complete change in her idea of Jeanne Lahaye.

"And yet," she scoffed, mockingly, "who is this milk-blooded saint that she should be better than another? She is not made of marble; her face told me that this morning, and who can limit the power of love? She would not do it in cold blood; but if Edmond Dupuis knew how to win her—if he were a man like Antoine—she would give up everything for him. Bah! what is love worth unless it makes a sacrifice? But after all what do these over-righteous statues know about love at all?"

CHAPTER IX.

SUBDUED.

“ JEANNE, my child, what is it?” Monsieur Eugène laid his hand timidly on the arm next him, as Jeanne sat beside him on the bench. She gave a start, and then a little shuddering sigh, and turned her white face towards him. “ Is there something unpleasant in the letter?” he said hesitatingly.

Jeanne smiled sadly as she put the letter into his hand.

“ You can read it if you please.”

Monsieur Eugène read it, and then looked at her in genuine surprise.

“ I do not understand; it is a very nice

letter. You will go this afternoon, and Alexis shall order a carriage to bring you home, my child."

"I shall not go."

Her dry, decided manner astonished Monsieur Eugène; it was so unlike her. He had been full of the request he wished to make, but this seemed an unsuitable time to speak of it.

"Uncle," said Jeanne, abruptly, "I will come back presently. I am not quite well."

There was a broad grass plot in front of the bench, and between this and the railings a slaty path which reached the house and bounded each end of the grass plot.

Jeanne crossed to this path, and began to walk up and down.

"Pauline Dupuis is Edmond's wife—" The words went on repeating themselves. She had thought Pauline was perhaps fanciful and morbid, and instead of this she had been more than right in her fear,

though she had not really divined the secret of her husband's coldness.

There was a struggle, and then Jeanne's true nature asserted itself. At the cost of whatever suffering she must cast her love from her. She must learn to forget Edmond. She sickened as she thought of the pain before her; but Pauline's tears helped her. How could she tell whether in some mysterious way her love might not influence Edmond's, and, if she persisted in it, draw him more and more from his wife? Could she after seeing the wife's anguish wish to keep any place in the husband's love? Jeanne's cheeks were no longer pale—they were dyed deep with shame. Till now this wife had been a shadow, an obstacle between her and her happiness, an insult to her pride; but now all this was over. Jeanne felt that she could not willingly see Pauline again—friendship between them was impossible—but she did not hate her. She was Edmond's

wife, and he must learn to love her and to make her happy. She could not say this easily; a sharp pang cut through her heart, and seemed to leave it bleeding, while she even thought of tearing out the love it had so cherished. But she must act: there was not time for dreaming.

She went back to Monsieur Eugène. "Uncle," she said, "I think I must go to the Hospice this morning; but I shall not be long away."

Monsieur Eugène had been nerving himself while she walked up and down.

"You can listen to me first, Jeanne. Will you sit down again?" She came back and sat down beside him. "Jeanne," he cleared his throat nervously, "I must speak to you about Raoul. He wishes much for you, and—and," he looked painfully embarrassed, "life will be happier and gayer with him in a great city like Paris than shut up at Montcour with an invalid like me."

"And you, uncle, how could I leave you?"

"That is what I have to tell you, dear Jeanne; we need not part. In the winter we can all live in Paris, and in summer we can go back to Montcour."

"And the people, *her* people? No," Jeanne shook her head, "I cannot leave them in the cold weather, just when they most need help."

"But, my dear child, Raoul has often told me we could let the Château to people, rich people, who would do probably more good in the village than we can do."

"Let the Château!" Jeanne thought this idea treasonable, she had nearly said it was worthy of Monsieur Raoul to propose it, but somehow she did not say it.

Instead she turned to Monsieur Eugène, and raising his thin hand, she kissed it gently.

"Uncle," she said, "I am cross and unreasonable; let me go now, I will give you my answer when I come back from the Hospice."

She went, leaving the gentle invalid puzzled, yet more hopeful than he had been when he first proposed Raoul as a husband. And he had some reason for hope.

Jeanne walked on in deep thought. Life for her had put on a shroud; for Pauline's letter had robbed Jeanne even of her dream of loving Edmond. Henceforth she must turn from this as she would turn from theft, or from coveting another's goods. Jeanne wondered why she had not seen this more clearly before; why the unknown wife's rights should not have been as sacred as those of the clinging little woman who had sought her love.

She shrank from seeing Pauline, but she could wish for her happiness as she had not thought of wishing for that of

the stranger who had robbed her of Edmond.

"If I never see him again," she thought, "he will forget me, and his love will return to her;" for it seemed to Jeanne that Edmond must surely have loved Pauline when he married her, and then the love he had shown her when they met came back to her, and she trembled—trembled both for him and for herself.

There was safety alone in distance. If she never saw him, she trusted by God's help to root out this terrible love which had so taken hold of her that it seemed to be herself. But if she saw him again, though she might mercifully be preserved from self-betrayal—— Jeanne paused, and her heart sank, the remembrance of last night was still too fresh not to keep her humble.

"My face would tell my love," she said; "and then, oh, the wrong that I should do Pauline!"

In Jeanne's nature petty thoughts could find no chinks to root in; she did not dwell an instant on Pauline's silliness, on her incapacity to hold the love of a man like Edmond. She could not help sighing bitterly over the wreck of her own hopes, the hopes that had so fondly pictured all she would have been to Edmond. A subtle temptation whispered how he had told her that he should always cling to her; and truly she felt, even in this trial, braver and stronger than he, but there was no vanity in this, Jeanne felt love too deeply not to believe in it.

"If they both love one another," she said, "all the rest will be right, and who can say that she will not make him happier than I should have done? He did not love as I do, or he could not have given me up"—her heart ached with anguish.

All at once she saw in the distance a

man coming along the lonely road. Jeanne trembled from head to foot. No, thank God, it was not Edmond! but she could not at once recover from her shivering fear. Would this happen whenever she saw him? She must leave Dinant, she must persuade Monsieur Eugène to go away at once, she could not run this fearful risk.

She was near the Hospice, when a thought, which had been haunting her dimly ever since she started, made itself distinct. Would it not be wiser, kinder, in every way an unselfish action, if she were to marry Raoul de Matagne? It would certainly be kindness to Edmond and to Pauline.

If he saw that she was faithless to him he would give up loving her; and she knew that though the thought of his coldness was painful, yet belief in it would help her own struggle for peace. By marrying Raoul she should content

both Monsieur Eugène and his brother. His brother—this was the dark side, and Jeanne shrank from it with loathing—would it be right to marry any man, not loving him.

“But there can be no sacrifice without pain,” and the pale, high-toned face looked as earnest as that of some martyr as she went up under the fast-yellowing avenue to the gate of the Hospice.

“You are early, my dear child,” the Sister said, as she came, jingling her keys, to answer the bell. “Madame Pauline was here yesterday, and she said you were coming to meet her at two o’clock, so I did not expect you so soon; but come in, come in, why do you stand outside, my dear young lady?”

Jeanne shook her head, and then the Sister saw the change in her face.

“I am not coming to see you to-day,” Jeanne said. “Will you give a message for me, dear Sister, to Madame Pauline?”

"Yes, yes." Sister Sophie felt interested and curious, it was so rarely that outside events came into her peaceful life, and she felt sure that there was something wrong with her visitor.

"Please give her my love," Jeanne spoke hurriedly, "and say I am very sorry, but I am unable to see her to-day."

"I am sorry, she will be so grieved,"—Sister Sophie felt quite troubled in anticipating Pauline's disappointment,—"poor little lady! she has set her heart on seeing you and taking you to her home."

But Jeanne felt braver now.

"I am sorry too, and it must seem rude to her; but it cannot be helped. You will tell her I am sorry, and—and you will give her my love."

She nodded and turned away; there was more tenderness in those mild eyes than she could bear, and she dreaded any questioning.

Sister Sophie watched her tall, supple figure as she walked down the avenue.

"She is unhappy, poor child ! She has trouble ; and such an angel of goodness as she is ! We will make a *novena* for her. She looks like one who will be made perfect through pain ; but we will pray that she may have courage to persevere."

And Jeanne, as she walked home, resolved to write to Monsieur Hallez. She would tell him of her meeting with Edmond, and of her danger ; and then ask his advice as to her marriage with Raoul de Matagne.

She had turned away from Sister Sophie only just in time. Her heart longed to go out to some one. She could have flung her arms round the kind, gentle sister, and sobbed on her bosom. It seemed to Jeanne that only now she fully realised the loss of Mademoiselle de Matagne ; her grandmother had taught her repression, but she had not chilled the warm nature

which had expanded into such devoted affection for her friend in those brief months at Château Montcour.

What happiness Jeanne had found there, and yet even then she had often pined for Edmond. Oh, what would she give for one of those serene, unconscious days? But she checked the longing as it came. Something warned her not to give way to any weakness while her path was still so beset with danger. It did not occur to her to bewail her solitary lot; to mourn that there was no loving heart in her home to help her to bear this burden; Monsieur Eugène was all kindness, yet she could never tell him her sad story. Jeanne felt to-day as she had not been able to feel yesterday, that there was a Friend who would never fail—a Love which was always hers.

CHAPTER X.

A DISCOVERY.

DAYS have gone by since Edmond found his wife sobbing as if her heart would break, lying with her face hidden on the cushion of the sofa. And then, when she roused to find him leaning over her, she burst out in passionate exclamations.

No one loved her ; no one ever would love her. She was such a foolish little creature. She had shown Jeanne too much fondness, and so she did not care for her friendship, it seemed as if she had at last found a friend, and now Jeanne had given her up.

Edmond had tried to pacify her, but it was difficult to bear her constant mention of Jeanne—so at last he left her.

But the next few days he was more at home than he had been for weeks. Mademoiselle Herkenne smiled at the justice of her conclusions, and Pauline was grateful to excess; she thought it was so very kind of Edmond to try in this way to make up for her disappointment.

The artists at Anseremme wondered what had made their well-to-do comrade give up his work all at once, just when the weather was at its brightest; and some of them shrugged their shoulders and said, “It is the way with amateurs.”

No one suspected that Edmond spent his time watching the chance of another meeting with Jeanne. He had found out that she lived across the river, at some distance from the town; but he shrank from questioning Pauline. His only idea was to carry out his resolution

of seeing Jeanne once more ; and then he would take Pauline to Italy and try to bear his life as best he could.

Pauline went almost daily to the Hospice, in the hope that she should see Jeanne. She had at last consoled herself with the idea that Monsieur de Matagne's illness had become more serious, and that her friend could not leave him. Still she thought that if Jeanne cared for her friendship she would write.

She could glean no tidings from Sister Sophie. Once, when she asked if Mademoiselle de Matagne had been lately to see them, the sister answered drily—“I can give you no news of her, Madame,” and she turned away.

One morning as Edmond passed the inn near the market-place, the landlord was sitting at a little table outside.

“Good day, Monsieur Dupuis,” he said, “I have good news for you ; we expect

your cousin, Monsieur Baconfoy, by the first boat."

Edmond turned away with a feeling of discomfiture. He did not want his cousin. He had not acknowledged to himself that there was any wrong in his endeavour to see Jeanne. It was but just and truthful, he argued, to justify himself in her eyes, and then bid her farewell ; but he could not look forward calmly to the scrutiny of his cousin's keen eyes. Besides, Baconfoy had a way of attaching himself to him in his walks, and what did he know, before he could effect a meeting with her, Jeanne might go away and leave no clue by which he could find her again.

He came in ruffled, and gave Pauline the short answers he had of late abstained from, and she went out of the room in low spirits. It had come into her head that perhaps Jeanne went to the Hospice in the morning, and she had there-

fore missed her by going in the afternoon. It was painful to feel that her friend had done this perhaps to avoid her, and Pauline shrank timidly from the idea of forcing herself upon Mademoiselle de Matagne; but the sudden change in Edmond's manner this morning brought back her longing for help, and she determined to go to the Hospice and wait there for the chance of seeing Jeanne.

She had been sitting for some time in the work-room of the Hospice beside Agathe, a crippled girl she had taught to knit.

The girl smiled with delight as she saw the pattern develop under her needles.

"If Madame would have the goodness to show Marie," she said shyly, "it would so please her."

"I will show her," said Pauline, "if you will take me to her; she is in the sick ward, I hear."

"I will ask Sister Sophie, Madame," and

Agathe limped away with a smile of delight.

Pauline waited, but the girl did not come back, and after a while Sister Sophie looked into the room where Pauline sat waiting, a little apart from the group of busy workers.

“ Will Madame come out into the garden, and see our dahlias ? ” the Sister said. She let Pauline pass out, and followed her till they reached the walk. “ I am sorry,” the Sister was ill at ease ; “ but you cannot see Marie, she is in the sick-ward, to-day, and you do not like sick people, Madame.”

“ I do not like sick people because I do not know how to speak to them ; but I can teach Marie to knit, Sister.”

Sister Sophie was not clever at keeping secrets, and her face showed her trouble.

“ Madame is very kind ; but—but Marie is really ill, and already she has a friend with her this morning.”

“ Mademoiselle de Matagne ?” Pauline felt a sudden indignation. “ No, Sister, I will not see Marie ; do not fear that I will force myself where I am not wished for.”

She turned away hastily, her eyes were hot with tears. It was too hard that Jeanne should shrink from her friendship. What had she done to vex her ? Tears fell before she could wipe them away from her eyes.

The kind Sister saw that she was crying, and she was troubled.

“ Mademoiselle de Matagne only stays a short time when she comes, Madame, and she would not come at all if poor Marie had not begged so hard to see her again ; but Mademoiselle never stays a minute to chat with me now.”

“ Ah,” and Pauline sighed. She could not shake off the impression that to avoid her Jeanne had given up her regular visits to the Hospice. “ Good-bye, Sister,” she said, “ I too have not a minute to chat, for

we are expecting to see a friend to-day."

" You must not go away unhappy," the Sister said kindly. Then as Pauline moved towards the gate, " Wait a moment, if you please, Madame."

Pauline could not get out through the locked gate, and the Sister had vanished through a side door. Would Jeanne come to her? One moment she shrank from seeming to force herself, and the next she craved for even a sight of her friend.

She clasped her hands over her eyes, and stood trying to calm her agitation. When she looked up Sister Sophie had unlocked the gate, and Jeanne stood beside it.

She smiled and came forward to meet Pauline, but self-conscious and fluttered as the little woman was, she was struck dumb by the change in Jeanne's face. It was so rigid in its calm paleness, the smile lasted only for an instant, and then faded, leaving the girl's lips almost colourless.

"I shall not be at Dinant long, Madame," she said, "and you must not think it unkind if I say we cannot meet again. I shall never return to Dinant, and I live in so remote a place that we are not likely to meet; believe me, it is much better for us to say good-bye to-day."

There was a sad thrill in her voice Pauline could not keep back her tears, and as she looked up at Jeanne there was such pathetic entreaty in those sweet brown eyes that all her wounded feelings were forgotten.

"You are ill, I fear," said Pauline. "It is selfish of me to worry you; but you hardly know how I long for your friendship."

Jeanne pressed her hand, and then bent down and kissed Pauline's forehead.

"I am sorry it cannot be. Good-bye. Remember, I am always your friend, and we can pray for one another; but please do not try to see me again."

She spoke so solemnly that Pauline stood silent and confounded, and she passed out at the gate and let Jeanne lock it behind her before she found courage to say a word. Then, when Jeanne's black dress had vanished round the corner of the building, Pauline gave way. She clung to the iron gate, and sobbed out her grief.

"It is my fate," she sighed to herself, as some while after she went slowly towards the bridge. "No one will ever care for me long; except those poor children at the Hospice, I am not sure that anyone really cares for me; they like me a little. Oh, if some one would really love me! Mademoiselle de Matagne finds there is nothing in me to love, and she thinks it is better to give me up altogether than to wound me by coldness when we meet. Ah, but it would have been something to try to win her love. If she had only known how the sight of her made me feel

better and wiser, I think she would have given me a chance."

And then she remembered Jeanne's pale sad face, and was hushed into silence.

CHAPTER XI.

MONSIEUR BACONFOY IS RUFFLED.

MONSIEUR BACONFOY stood in the middle of the Place at Dinant, his broad, genial face beaming with satisfaction. It was market-day, and he towered grandly above the groups of buyers and sellers. The sun shone full on him as he stood among them, his legs a little apart, nodding and doffing his hat to his many acquaintances.

He had already had a chat with the hotel-keeper, and with some of the idlers seated on the bench in front of the café, and he had learned that both Monsieur

and Madame Dupuis had passed across the bridge, and might soon be expected back again.

Baconfoy did not object to the delay. He was a keen observer, and he amused himself in watching the faces of the careful housekeepers of Dinant as they bargained over their cabbages and eggs and fruit with the brown wrinkled countrywomen, who looked as if they had absorbed sunshine enough to bake them.

Presently among the buyers he saw a figure that seemed to have dropped from another sphere. There was a style and an ease in the dress and movements of the tall figure certainly foreign to homely little Dinant, and as the lady turned from the egg-stall he saw her face; it was the photographer's housekeeper.

Baconfoy mistrusted women, but for all that he liked to talk to one that had so attractive an appearance as Mademoiselle Herkenne; and Elise had, when she chose

to exert it, a power of fascination that often made her irresistible ; perhaps that was why Vidonze had found himself compelled to treat her with a deference he would not have dreamed of bestowing on an ordinary housekeeper.

Elise had not forgotten Monsieur Baconfoy's visit at Namur, and now there was a courtesy in his low bow which pleased her.

"Good day, Mademoiselle," he said ; "I am waiting for this pair of lovers, our friends who I hear have gone off for a walk."

Mademoiselle Herkenne bowed and smiled.

"They are both from home, Monsieur ; but you have been misinformed, they are not together. Madame Dupuis has gone to the Hospice."

She turned to walk away, but Baconfoy walked beside her.

"Madame Pauline is a good little soul to go shutting herself up on a fine day like

this with a lot of invalids. Well, Mademoiselle, I hear great things of your success. I congratulate you, Vidonze tells me you have a wonderful faculty for business."

A glow of pleasure stole into her dark face.

"Yes, Monsieur, I believe Monsieur Vidonze is satisfied."

"Is he here? we have not seen him in Namur this fortnight; a lady staying at my house is most impatient that he should take her portrait."

"No, he is not here, but he may come any day; he has written to say he will soon be here."

She guessed that Vidonze had been spending this time in pursuit of Jeanne, and she walked on in silence; Baconfoy wondered whether she cared specially for her employer.

"She is far too good for him, so far as looks and manner go, but she is just the wife he wants, she would change him from

a rolling stone into something practical."

Then as he took his leave, and went in search of his cousin, he thought how much better it would have been for Edmond if he had found a wife who would have ruled him, instead of the spoiling worship he had found in Pauline. "But then"—he smiled at himself—"I should have had to give up my theory of marriage. It is always a mistake, the right man always gets the wrong woman, or it is the other way; the only safety would be to wait till middle age before choosing; so many of these young fillies develop into biters and prancers; and it is the same with the men, a boy that at school was as dull as a calf, will turn into a roaring bullock as he grows older; but it is worse with the women, because it is part of their nature to sham—Hullo ! Edmond !"

Edmond was coming towards him, but with his eyes bent on the ground. He

started, and then Baconfoy's cordial greeting warmed him out of his listless state.

"And where is Madame Pauline? I thought she would have been with you;" he gave Edmond an inquiring look.

"She has gone to the Hospice, on the other side of the river."

"Well, then, let us go and find her, I—I,"—he said it awkwardly, as if he were ashamed—"I know where it is, the Sisters there are very good sort of creatures."

"I should not have thought they were in your line at all," said Edmond, laughing.

"Oh, yes, I have seen them;" he did not say that on his last visit he had gone of his own accord to the Hospice, and after having been shown over it had presented a liberal donation for the suffering inmates. "You are working hard at painting, I suppose?" he said to his cousin.

"Not just now;" he was so afraid of Baconfoy's questions that it was a relief to see Pauline coming towards them from the other side of the bridge.

Baconfoy saw her too, and hurried forward to meet her—his cheery smile comforted her wounded heart. But she soon turned from him to Edmond; she was so anxious to tell him her news.

"Jeanne does still go to the Hospice"—she said, eagerly. "I have seen her to-day; but—" she began to sob—"she is going away, and she says that, as she shall never come back here, I shall never see her again. Do you hear, Edmond?" for he had turned away, and was looking up the river; "perhaps I shall never see her again. She goes early to the Hospice only to see a sick girl, and she says she and I had better not meet any more."

Baconfoy had caught the name Jeanne, and he had seen Edward's suddenly changed expression before he turned from

his wife. Monsieur Jules's curiosity was on the alert; Pauline's distress puzzled him.

"Who is Jeanne?" he spoke to Pauline, but he looked at Edmond. "Is she a new friend of yours?"

Pauline wiped her eyes.

"Not exactly a friend," she said, sighing; "but I used to see her there. She is Mademoiselle de Matagne. Oli! how you would admire her!" she went on; "she is so noble and beautiful. I do not mean prettiness—she is far more than pretty; she is just what a Jeanne should be; but I cannot talk of her," and then Pauline sighed deeply.

Edmond stood leaning over the bridge; he seemed to have forgotten his companions. Monsieur Baconfoy walked on beside Pauline, more inquisitive than ever. Somehow Pauline felt comforted by the very sight of his broad, honest face, and his cheery, kind, dark eyes; it seemed as if

she had found a father who might help her a little, though not as Jeanne could have helped her.

“ You speak very sadly about this wonderful person,” he said, in his laughing way as they walked across the Place. “ She seems rather too much for you, my fair cousin. What does Edmond say about her?”

“ He has not seen her—that is part of my trouble, I so wished him to see her;” her voice quavered, and then sank into a sob.

Baconfoy was alarmed ; he was not used to women, and he had no idea how to treat a crying specimen of the sex. He would have preferred to leave Pauline to herself, but it seemed unkind to go away from her. But Pauline recovered herself quickly.

“ Cousin Jules,” she said, “ I am very fond of Jeanne, and I thought she was going to be my friend ; and she was so

kind, and promised to come and see me, and then all at once she changed, and left a message at the Hospice that she could not come; and I have never seen her since till to-day, and now she says we can never meet again.”

“ You are sure Edmond has never seen her?” said Baconfoy, carelessly.

“ Quite sure; but why do you ask?”

“ Well, you know,” he laughed again in his mocking fashion, “ everyone cannot think as you do, Madame Dupuis; and it is possible that the lady has taken a dislike to your husband, and does not wish to see him.”

“ How can you say such things—just as if every woman does not like Edmond. Even Mademoiselle Herkenne, to whom he so seldom speaks, likes him; and Madame Boulotte adores him?”

Monsieur Jules reddened.

“ *Ma foi!* did she tell you so, and do you consider it proper that another lady should

adore your husband ? fie ! I am scandalised, Madame Pauline."

"Nonsense!" said Pauline, gaily ; "at Madame Boulotte's age it is different."

Monsieur Baconfoy grew suddenly grave.

"You talk like a baby, my dear. I only wish I were as young as Madame Boulotte is. If—if—but no matter. Now I must go back and see what has become of that laggard Edmond."

He was ruffled, and even when Edmond joined him and they overtook Pauline, he took little notice of her. As they went into the house Mademoiselle Herkenne was coming out of the glass door, and Baconfoy bowed to her again.

"You will not forget my message to Vidonze, Mademoiselle, when you see him ? You will tell him that business waits for him at home. This lady is impatient to have her portrait taken by the famous photographer of Namur. *Au revoir, Mademoiselle;*" he went upstairs

laughing. “Vidonze will believe that if she tells him,” he said.

“She will tell him,” said Pauline. “I think Mademoiselle Elise likes to please Monsieur Vidonze.”

“She is a wise woman; and he, does he care to please Mademoiselle Elise?”

Pauline shook her head.

“I do not think so; but then—” she added, timidly, “men do not care to please us as women care to please men; and Monsieur Vidonze is not a man who would love anyone.”

Baconfoy smiled, but he thought of Madame Boulotte’s story of her brother’s love.

“Did she say she expected Vidonze?” Edmond had followed them upstairs in silence.

“Yes,” Baconfoy answered, “Mademoiselle says he may come any day. She is a very fine woman; Vidonze might do a great deal worse.”

CHAPTER XII.

A PARTING.

THE prospect of Vidonze's arrival kept Edmond awake all through that night—and daylight did not quiet his uneasiness. The very faculty which he admired so much in Vidonze—his hawk-eyed keenness—he feared now. If the photographer stayed more than a day in Dinant, Edmond felt sure he would discover Jeanne.

“When we were together that time at Spa,” he thought, “the fellow saw in an instant what it would have taken me days to discover, and which perhaps would have escaped me altogether; and not only that, this housekeeper will tell him Jeanne is

here ;" for he remembered that Pauline had said Mademoiselle Herkenne knew Jeanne.

It was torture to Edmond to think that Vidonze loved Jeanne ; it seemed a sort of profanation that such a man should regard her in that way.

"But she would not listen to him," he said, vehemently ; "no, not for a moment. She is so pure that of necessity she will recoil from a man who has lived as Vidonze has." And then he thought that, feeling herself wronged and deserted, there was a risk in her seeing this man ; he had heard strange things of what even good women had done under the influence of resentment—"She must know the truth ; she must know at once that she has never been given up by me ; she must listen to the real facts about my marriage. What shall I do ? What can I do ?"

At breakfast time, Baconfoy joked him about his silence.

" Brooding over a new picture, eh ? Come, my boy, I want you to take me to Bouvignes—or, if Madame can accompany us, why should we not all take the steamer to Houx and walk back by way of the cliffs."

Edmond brightened.

" Yes, that would be excellent," he said. " You shall take Pauline, and I will walk to meet you on your way back."

" You are a nice, lazy fellow. Well, Madame Pauline and I shall get on very well without you."

Pauline pouted ; but Edmond kept his eyes away, and busied himself in making preparation for a sketch he said he must begin. As he left the room he muttered something about not losing so fine a morning in the house ; and then he took his way to the Hospice.

As soon as he reached the avenue, he seated himself in the forlorn, grass-grown

road, and opened his sketch-book. He had determined, if he waited for hours, that this morning he would see Jeanne. If she were not alone, he hesitated how to act, for, as the secret had been kept so far, it seemed much better it should not reach Pauline's ears.

"She would never forget," he said, "and it is not worth while to give her such a grievance against me; and it will be kinder to her."

So long as he had been vaguely trying to see Jeanne again, he had been too much disturbed by excitement to forecast the meeting: but Pauline's news had made it plain that she was to be found either going to or coming away from the Hospice, and if he waited with determination he must see her. If they met in the street, Jeanne would try to avoid him; he felt sure of this—indeed he would not wish her to be at ease with him. Though sometimes he told himself that a proud spirit like hers

would triumph over her love, she would not be able to forgive the wrong done her by his marriage. And then when he remembered the love he had seen in her eyes, hope lived on.

But to-day, as he sat waiting, and Jeanne did not come, hope grew faint within him; he began at last to think that he might have been observed from one of the windows, and that to avoid him Jeanne had gone another way. No one came up or down the lonely avenue, but from far off occasional tokens of life reached him—not distinct sounds, but a murmur more like the hum of bees, or the far off caw of a community of rooks.

He had been trying to sketch a bit of the avenue, but he made slow progress, for his head was not with his hand. In the midst of his fumbling efforts, the dinner-bell at the Hospice clanged loudly into the stillness. He did not know how

intensely he longed to see Jeanne till this end to his hopes came. And now he must wait till to-morrow—no, he could not wait. A mad impulse seized him. He would rush all over the neighbouring country; he must and would find out the house where Jeanne lived. He turned from the Hospice and took the road beside the river leading to Bouvignes.

He had walked some way from the town, as he had often walked before, but to-day he took a side road that led him farther from the river; a little way on he came in front of a garden railed off from the road. A large house stood back in the garden, and there were wooden seats below the windows. A gentleman sat on one of these seats, reading; at least he held a book, but his eyes seemed to be straying from it.

Edmond stood, not exactly looking at him, but resting against the railings; it seemed useless to go farther in this direc-

tion ; even so far as this would be a long walk for Jeanne. While he stood irresolute, the gentleman turned round to the open window behind him and called out, "Jeanne."

Edmond stood fascinated. A thrill went through him ; but no answer followed the call ; and after a while a servant came out of the house, and he and the gentleman disappeared through a small gate on the Bouvignes side of the garden.

It seemed to Edmond an absurd conjecture, and yet he felt persuaded that Jeanne Lahaye lived in this house. He resolved to linger about for the chance of seeing her come out into the garden ; then suddenly, without taking any counsel with himself, he went round to the gate which he had passed before he came in sight of the house ; the gate was open, and he went boldly in and crossed the garden to the flight of steps in front of the entrance door, and rang the rusty bell which hung

beside it. The bell sounded hollow, as if the house were deserted, and the time after he had rung before anyone came seemed very long. Then a quiet-looking woman came and asked what he wanted.

"I want to see Mademoiselle de Matagne," he said, firmly. If the woman had said "No such person lives here," he would not have believed her, his conviction was now so strong that Jeanne was here. It was no surprise to him, it scarcely quickened his pulses, to hear the woman say—

"Will Monsieur come with me?"

He followed along a gallery at the back of the house; the side of the gallery was glass, and through it he saw the garden. At the end of the gallery was a door with a curtain drawn across, and as the woman lifted this she asked Edmond his name.

He was not taken by surprise, he had prepared what he should say as he followed her.

" You can show me in," he smiled, " I am an old friend whom Mademoiselle Jeanne will be glad to see."

The easy smile and " Mademoiselle Jeanne" satisfied the maid ; she drew aside the curtain, opened the door, and closed it upon Edmond. Then she went back to her kitchen without troubling herself about the visitor.

Jeanne was writing to Monsieur Hallez. She had already written to tell him of her meeting with Edmond, and to ask his advice about Monsieur Raoul ; but she was now telling him about Pauline, and of the sorrow which she had caused the poor little wife.

As she wrote, her own sorrow was very present to Jeanne, and tears fell on her paper. She looked up when the door opened—but she did not move—Edmond gave her no time to speak.

" You must pardon me for coming here. I have come to see you on a matter of

business ; you have nothing to fear from me, Jeanne."

He stood still at the farther end of the table at which Jeanne was sitting ; but his eyes were fixed on her face, taking note of every feature as if he were learning by heart every shade of expression, every tint of the varying colour that showed how deeply moved she was.

" Why do you come here, Monsieur Dupuis?" she said, coldly. " I said we must not meet again—it is wrong."

" We will not meet after to-day. Will that satisfy you ?" He spoke bitterly, for it seemed to him Jeanne had already cast him out of her heart ; " but you must, if you please, listen to me now."

Jeanne had risen while he spoke, and she stood resting her clasped hands on the table. She knew that this interview was foolish and wrong, but Edmond's tone was so determined that she felt obliged to listen.

"When I told you I was married," he grew pale with agitation as he spoke, "you thought I had forgotten you. I never forgot you, Jeanne. When your letter came refusing to marry me, I upbraided you, but I loved you still all the time. My heart was hungering for some answer to the love I had poured out in that letter; Jeanne, I have never left off loving you."

She had stood quite still, her eyes fixed on her clasped hands; now she turned restlessly away, her heart was throbbing wildly.

"I cannot listen to you," she said; but her voice was hoarse and broken, and joy came back to Edmond at the sound.

"My story is not much longer," he went on. "I only want to do myself a little justice in your eyes. I had got into the way of seeing a—a friend; I believe because I was too miserable, too cowardly you will say, to bear my sorrow

alone. Yes, I was a coward ! a fool ! Oh, Jeanne, no names that you can heap on me can match what I think myself to be.” She moved again restlessly. “ Well, I—I found that while I had been meaning friendship, my friend considered me her lover, and I was weak enough—fool enough—wicked enough, if you will, to ask her to be my wife.”

There was a pause. Edmond kept his eyes fixed on Jeanne’s face. Presently she said in a low voice.

“ Thank you for telling me this—but she is your wife, and you must love her. Now, Monsieur Dupuis, will you—will you leave me ? ”

“ No, not yet.” He drew himself up ; he felt freed from a burden now that he had confessed to Jeanne. “ I have not told you everything. I told her I had no love to give ; that I loved one who did not return my love,—but I could not love again.”

“ And she was content with this ? ”

Jeanne startled herself by her own vehemence.

“Yes,” he moved nearer to her, “and—Jeanne, this gives me the right still to love you. I shall never see you again, for I feel that you despise me; but you are in my heart; my life, my love, are yours. My wife cannot expect from me that which I told her she could not have—she married me on her own terms.”

Jeanne’s impulse was to cover her face. She dreaded that it might betray her, and yet some warning, felt rather than heard, whispered her to keep outwardly unmoved.

“This is unworthy of you,” she said; her voice wavered, though she strove to speak hardly; “when you first married you owed your wife nothing; but—but now it is different. You used to be generous, Edmond.”—She hesitated; the name had slipped out against her fixed purpose; the blood flowed over her pale

cheeks. She tried to feel angry with him. "Surely when you know how your wife loves you, you must love her in return."

Edmond had grown bolder; he began to feel by little signs and tokens that Jeanne was fighting against herself. He told himself that this was their last meeting. Why should not nature have its way? Jeanne had been his once, and in spite of all that had happened, he had never left off loving her.

"Jeanne"—though she did not look up, she felt his gaze, and it seemed to burn into her soul—"you say what you do not really believe in. You know what love is—then can you tell me my love is a puppet to be given first to one and then to another as what you call duty bids? Child, child—do not make my misery greater than it is." The agony in his voice seemed to rend away reserve from Jeanne, and to make her feel that she

must at once fly from him if she would not own her love. “Jeanne, can you not feel that our love, yours and mine, is so entwined with life that it is a part of us; that we cannot tear it out of ourselves, unless we tear our hearts out with it. Listen,” for Jeanne was moving towards the door, slowly, because she knew that as he stood Edmond could at once intercept her flight, “I have told you all my miserable folly, and for comfort you fling me a stone. You bid me go home and love my wife—Oh, God! how can you be so cruel? What harm can it do you to feel that I love you always?”

But Jeanne’s struggle was over; she had cried out for help, and the cloud that seemed to blind her at first had cleared away.

“Monsieur Dupuis,” her voice was quiet again, though it sounded as if it were full of kept-back tears; the sweet, low tones vibrated through him, “all this is

useless. I do not deny that I have loved you, that I still love you ; but you might as well hope to call back the dead to life as to make me go on loving you when I know it is a sin. . . . I can never forget you. . . . God knows how I shall pray that happiness may come to you. Try, dear friend, to see how much you wrong yourself by every word of love you now speak to me."

She stopped ; she could find no more words.

" You will at least say ' Good-bye ? ' " He held out his hand, and Jeanne placed her quivering fingers in his ; and her eyes met Edmond's. Then a shiver ran through her, and shook her from head to foot, and he heard a stifled sob.

" Jeanne—my Jeanne," he said, tenderly pressing the cold fingers in both his burning hands, " why will you harden yourself against nature ? There is no harm in your love for me. You could not love unless God had given you the

power, and you do love me still, my own Jeanne I shall never see you again ; think of the years that lie before me ; give me one joy in this depth of misery, let me hear those dear lips once more say, ‘I love you.’”

A sudden strength came to Jeanne. She met Edmond’s eyes fearlessly now.

“Let me go,” she said, proudly. “ You have broken your promise.”

He dropped her hand and stood still till she reached the door.

“ Say you forgive me. Do not let us part angrily. I have not your strength of will, Jeanne but you shall not see me again.”

“ I forgive you ; but I must go. Every minute I spend with you is a sin against your wife. Try to think how sad and desolate her life must be without her husband’s love.” She waved her hand, and closed the door behind her.

Edmond stood gazing after her, then

mechanically, not heeding where he went, he quitted the house, and walked as if in a trance along the road by which he had come. He was unconscious of time or place, guided by instinct only, till roused suddenly by the movement around him, he found himself in the Grande Rue of Dinant, near home.

CHAPTER XIII.

FLIGHT.

NO surer proof could be found of the utter blindness which true love causes than in Jeanne's feeling towards Edmond Dupuis. She did not know, except by her bodily exhaustion, how intensely she had suffered in this struggle with herself; but she felt no bitterness towards Edmond, she did not even say to herself that he had been cruel in thus rousing into fresh vigour the love against which she had striven. She stumbled on, blinded and stricken, to her room and sank on her knees, and thanked

God for the help He had given. Her head sank on her shoulder, and a sort of stupor made her for the time blessedly unconscious. Then suddenly she roused to vivid consciousness of her love, and struggling against its power she poured out a confession of it as she still knelt beside her bed. For Jeanne had no modern sophistry to confuse her judgment, she knew—and these minutes of dire temptation had made her know yet more keenly—that it was sin to love a man whose own love, whether he had given it or not, belonged to the woman he had married.

She prayed that this love, which was making every fibre bleed as she struggled against the thought of it, might be taken away from her. But prayer seemed to bring no comfort. It seemed to fall back upon her.

She rose from her knees and sat down to think. If she were to enter a convent she could put an eternal barrier

between herself and Edmond ; but this idea appeared false and cowardly. . . . She was in the dark, groping for what she did not know ; prayer had seemed a refuge—something that would help to drive out this terrible love, but it had brought no comfort. . . . But she felt dimly that she must not cease to struggle with her love—at last she had learned its strength.

After awhile she lay down on her bed. In this reaction from her enforced calm, she was trembling as if an ague had seized her.

One thing she saw clearly ; she must not remain in the neighbourhood of Edmond ; she dared not. Only absence could bring back security and calm. She did not hope for peace, Jeanne knew there could not be peace in her heart so long as the mere thought of Edmond had such power over her. How was she to escape him ?

She had pledged herself not to leave

Monsieur Eugène, but that was when he was a comparatively helpless invalid, entirely dependent on her society.

“If I stay here it will be doing evil that good may come,” she said, simply. “I dare not run the risk.”

Something warned her that so long as Edmond believed she loved him, so long would he persist in loving her; and though she had struggled till the suffering had been beyond her strength, she had an uneasy feeling that Edmond had been aware of this struggle, and that he still believed in her love. No good, nothing but harm, could come of another meeting, and it would be a direct injury to Pauline. Yes, unless she went away there must remain a daily dread, a daily risk.

At last she rose up, smoothed her hair, and went down to look for Monsieur Eugène. He had come back from his walk, and was sitting on his favourite bench beneath the windows.

He welcomed her with his usual smile ; but at the sight of her face the smile faded, and he sat upright in his chair and looked nervous.

“ Uncle,” she did not give him time to speak, “ will you let me go back to Château Montcour ? I—I am not well here ; and besides, I have a reason for going home, and I shall have the house quite ready for you when you have finished taking your baths.”

Monsieur Eugène’s face was full of astonishment. At first he only stared, then he said :

“ And Raoul ? What answer am I to give him.”

“ I had forgotten Monsieur Raoul.”

“ But you will tell me before you go ; you are not in a hurry, Jeanne, you do not want to go for a week. There is going to be a fair across the river, I saw the row of booths this morning just below the bridge ; and I hear there will be fireworks ; it is just

what would please you, and you can buy toys in plenty for the little ones at the Hospice. You will wait for the fair, Jeanne ?”

He looked childishly pleased in anticipation.

Jeanne clenched her hands tightly.

“ I must go at once. Please do not ask me why, dear uncle ; but if *she* had been here she would have wished me to go away. Some day at Montcour I will tell you everything—only say that I may go ?”

She clasped her hands earnestly together ; there was such a piteous look in her eyes that Monsieur Eugène felt shocked and taken by surprise ; it seemed to him that Jeanne almost belonged to Raoul already, and that Raoul ought to be consulted about her movements.

“ But,” he spoke fretfully, “ surely you will give me an answer for Raoul ; and then you cannot travel alone, there are many things to arrange.”

“Yes, yes, uncle”—Jeanne felt that she must adopt the motherly tone that Mademoiselle de Matagne had always used towards her brother—“I have arranged all that. I will take Marie; you know she must have gone first to get the house ready; and I will leave you Louis and Eulalie. There, dear uncle, you see it is all right.”

“But Raoul?” he persisted.

The invalid was rubbing his hands together with a very troubled face.

Jeanne stood still a moment; she had not heard from Monsieur Hallez, but she knew now what her answer must be.

“I am sorry, uncle, but I cannot marry Monsieur Raoul,” she bent down and kissed one of his delicate wasted hands. “I can never marry. Let me stay with you at Montcour. I want no other life.”

He drew his hand away and sighed; for the first time he found Jeanne unreasonable and headstrong; but his

reading had taught him there was no use in thwarting a woman's will.

"You seem to have made up your mind, I am disappointed," he said, coldly.
"Of course I can say nothing more. I will write to Raoul."

In his heart he blamed his sister; but for the written instructions she had left that Jeanne was to have full liberty of choice, the marriage might have been happily arranged. He should have presented Raoul to Jeanne as her husband, and she would have obeyed as a matter of course.

But he was too amiable to cherish anger against Jeanne. She left him, and at once began her preparations, for she had resolved to start very early next day, and when at night she bade him farewell, he was as gentle and kind as usual.

"Forgive me," she said; "I know I seem hard and abrupt, but some day I

will tell you everything, and then you will say I acted rightly."

It was wonderful to see how this call on her energy had helped Jeanne. She slept soundly, and next morning was able to start on her journey with a cheerful face, though, when she got the last glimpse of Dinant from the railway carriage, her heart felt a sudden wrench. She knew that this was really her final parting from Edmond Dupuis.

It was afternoon before she reached Comblain au Pont, and while she waited for a carriage to take her and her possessions to Château Montcour, she saw a face she knew among some loiterers outside the station.

"Good day, Monsieur Charles," she said. "How have you all been in our absence?"

Charles was bowing profoundly; his joy brought tears to his eyes.

"Ah, Mademoiselle; but this is indeed

an unlooked for happiness. There will be a chorus of thanksgiving in the village."

"Thank you ;" Jeanne felt a warm glow at her heart at this welcome.

"You must tell Monsieur Jacques and Monsieur Auguste that I am coming to see them to-morrow."

"But surely Mademoiselle is not expected?" said Charles. "I was at the Château this morning, and old Babette said she did not know when Mademoiselle and Monsieur would come home. Ah, Mademoiselle, the Château will be cold and damp and full of dust; will Mademoiselle honour the hotel by going there to-night, and I will send a girl to help Babette to get the Château ready for to-morrow?"

"Very well," said Jeanne, "if you can take us in, Monsieur Charles, I think it will be the best plan. Come, Marie, we are going to the Coq d'Or instead of the Château."

Marie looked doubtful ; the De Matagne family never slept at the inn, and she was not sure that it was a right thing to do ; but she had to follow Jeanne, while Charles Cajot mounted the box, enchanted at the honour that was about to be conferred on his house.

Until he was halfway home along the picturesque road beside the Amblève, he did not remember his promise to Antoine Vidonze ; it was when his head was full of a special new omelette invented by the cook, and which he decided should be extemporised for “Mam’zelle Jeanne,” that he suddenly remembered his engagement to tell the photographer. He wished he had held his tongue, but the brothers Cajot were men of honour : “I made a promise, so I must keep it,” he said with a sigh.

CHAPTER XIV.

PURSUIT.

MONSIEUR BACONFOY'S visit to Dinant was drawing to a close. In two days or so visitors of importance were expected at La Grue, and his presence would be necessary; and yet he was unwilling to go away without getting one private talk with his cousin Edmond. There seemed always something in the way. Either Edmond went sketching, or Pauline offered to join the two men in their walks; and yet ever since the time when Edmond, after being out all day and missing his appointment with them at Houx, had come in pale and exhausted, and so irri-

table that his wife scarcely dared to speak to him, his cousin Jules had felt more than ever sure that there was something very wrong with his young cousin.

He had always looked upon himself in the light of a parent to the orphan left so entirely to his care, and though Edmond was married, and might be considered fit to take care of himself—the good-natured cynic rather doubted this—he could not feel justified in leaving him entirely self-dependent.

“He may be in debt,” he thought, “and he is too proud to apply to his wife; besides they evidently do not pull together as they did when they were first married.” He was surprised to find how sorry this conviction made him, and yet it confirmed so admirably his theory against marriage. “It is sad,” he went on, “but I cannot mend it, though I will speak to Edmond to-day.”

"I should like a walk with you when you have done sketching to-day, Edmond," he said; "we will not take Madame with us—it will be too far for her; let us walk over to Montaigle."

"Very well;" but Edmond would rather have been left to himself.

Pauline came in presently with a packet of letters for Monsieur Baconfoy.

"I believe I am right," she said, smiling at Jules. "I really think Elise cares for Monsieur Vidonze; she is quite excited at the idea of his coming to-day."

"Are you sure he is coming?" said Edmond.

"She says so. So many letters have come for him that she feels sure he will arrive to-day. I wish he would marry her, it would be a wise thing for both."

"Do you think he would make a good husband?" Baconfoy asked. "Do you

not think Mademoiselle Herkenne is better off as she is?"

"Not if she loves Monsieur Vidonze." Pauline spoke gravely, and Baconfoy wondered whether she had really found marriage a happy state.

Edmond shrank with a sort of loathing from the idea of seeing the photographer.

"I shall not sketch to-day," he said to his cousin. "I am at your service whenever you like to start for Montaigle."

Pauline felt disappointed, but she knew she could not walk so far, and for some days past she had not ventured on the slightest contradiction of her husband. Edmond had been silent and stern, and when he had spoken to her it had always been to find fault.

When they had left her she thought over Baconfoy's words.

"Am I so very happy?" she thought.

"What makes me think marriage a happy state? I begin to see that one is happy just at first, and then it changes. Ah, but," her eyes filled with tears, "one can always have the joy of loving, even if one is not loved."

Meantime the two cousins had crossed the bridge; just as they were passing the railway station, Antoine Vidonze was coming down the steps, and he saw them going by the gate.

He hailed Edmond Dupuis, and flung up his arms to express his joy at the meeting, while Edmond wished the "vulgar, noisy fellow," as he called him, at the bottom of the Meuse.

"Come back, come back with me," said Vidonze, "you do not know what I have to show you; views that will make your hair curl, my good fellow," he slapped Edmond boisterously on the shoulder; "if you could only paint some of them you might call yourself lucky, and make

yourself famous ; come along, I say."

"Look here, Vidonze, Dupuis and I have some business together ;" Baconfoy did not like the photographer much better than Edmond did, although he was not so fastidious. "You go and have your dinner, and read your letters, Mademoiselle has plenty for you, and Dupuis and I will see these treasures when we come back ; *au revoir*, my friend," and with his broad smile he patted the half-angry, red-bearded man on the arm, and taking Edmond along with him, he started off at a brisk pace.

"Most haste worse speed," Vidonze growled after them, "there is no time like the present."

The two cousins walked on for some time in silence. Edmond spoke first.

"Could you fancy it possible, Jules, that any nice woman could listen to the love of such a fellow as that?"

Baconfoy laughed.

“ You have come to the wrong man, *mon cher*. Madame Pauline would tell you that I am not to be listened to on the subject of woman, but looking at it without prejudice I do not see why Vidonze should not have as good a chance with the fair sex as another ; he is tall and good-looking, and good looks do wonders with women.”

“ You know better, he is a great coarse brute,” said Edmond, irritably. “ I cannot think that a high-minded woman would listen to him for a moment.”

Baconfoy noticed the bitter way in which the young man spoke.

“ I am not sure of the person you mean. Mademoiselle Herkenne is a fine woman, but she hardly looks high-minded. I fancy she would have our photographic friend if he asked her.”

“ I was not thinking of Mademoiselle Herkenne.”

Edmond walked on silently, as if he had

done with the subject, but Baconfoy's curiosity was whetted.

"Perhaps you are thinking of Mademoiselle Lahaye? that is another matter. But, from what Madame Boulotte told me, she seems to have disappeared, no one knows where she is. However, Vidonze is a determined fellow, he will find her one of these days, and then, *ma foi*, who knows, he will marry her whether she wishes it or not."

"I do not believe it, I will not believe it! you do not know the person you are talking of!" he said, angrily.

"*Ma foi!* I know she is a woman." Baconfoy's laugh drove Edmond wild in his over-wrought state. "But you are very touchy to-day, Edmond, and I wonder what cousin Pauline would say to this enthusiasm for Mademoiselle Jeanne."

Edmond glared at him as if he were going to strike him, then he said,

"I thought you too great a philosopher to meddle between man and wife."

Baconfoy looked grave at once.

"I shall not meddle between man and wife, but I had better speak out," he said.

"You have always come to me for advice, Edmond, before I offered it, now I offer it before you come to me. Things are not right with you lately; what is it, *mon cher*? are you in debt? can I help you? you may as well be frank, you are the only child I shall ever have?" As he ended his genial smile came back.

Edmond's heart reproached him, and yet he could not tell the truth. He would not do Pauline the added wrong of confessing to anyone but Jeanne that he did not love his wife.

"You are a good fellow, Jules, and I am tiresome and hasty-tempered, as I always was. I suppose the worries and restraints of marriage do not improve a

man's temper. I am not speaking against my wife, Heaven knows she is far too good for me, but I agree with you that for some men marriage is a mistake."

" You have not answered my question. What is wrong? Are you in debt?"

" On the contrary, we live so far within our income that I had thought of taking Pauline to Italy, and studying art there for a year or so."

Baconfoy noticed that he said all this sadly, as of a thing to be done, without any of the enthusiasm with which he would once have spoken of such a journey.

" Well," he said, " I see you will not give me your confidence, so we will talk of something else; but by your own showing you have no right to be gloomy; you say you have a good wife—I can see she is charming—you are not troubled with money matters; you have good health, and can employ your time as you choose;

and, best of all, you have a talent which gives you employment. I never met with so fortunate a man. What ails you, Edmond? Perhaps you want a little misery thrown in to make you value what you have."

A groan that was almost a sob burst from Edmond Dupuis.

"For God's sake talk of somebody or something else, as you suggested; but never think I do not trust you, Jules."

He wrung his cousin's hand hard, and then they walked on silently.

By the time they had reached the ruined castle of Montaigle, Edmond's spirits had come back. He rattled on about the beauties and the ancient glories of the place; and even joked Baconfoy on his unwillingness to trust his ponderous weight on the broken, fern-clad steps leading to the subterranean part of the ruins. He sketched rapidly in his notebook one or two points that Baconfoy

specially admired, and by the time they had reached Dinant again he was brighter and blither than he had been for weeks.

Pauline gave them a charming welcome, and they found the table already spread for supper.

“I thought you would be hungry after your walk,” the little woman said, “so Valérie and I planned to have supper an hour sooner. We have both been hard at work to get it ready.”

Edmond thought how pretty and bright she was looking, blushing over her own housewifery, and Baconfoy was enchanted.

“You almost reconcile me to matrimony, my dear child,” he said. “I had no idea a wife could be notable and charming all at once.”

Presently, when he had done justice to a dish-full of brilliant scarlet *écrevisses de Meuse*, which glowed in the dish against the cool green of vine leaves, he said :

"Have you seen Vidonze? Has he called here?"

Pauline gave a little scream, and clapped her hands. Edmond's smile and Monsieur Baconfoy's praise had brought back the sparkle to her spirits.

"Oh!" she cried, "I had quite forgotten my news. Mademoiselle Elise is in despair. I saw for the first time great tears in the poor thing's eyes, and it is very hard for her. She had so counted on keeping Monsieur Vidonze here at least two or three days."

Edmond turned pale; he stammered as he spoke.

"What do you mean? Is he gone again?"

"Listen," she raised her finger in mock authority, "and I will tell you how it all happened. I was sitting at needle-work; it was before I thought of hurrying supper, you know,"—she did not see Edmond's impatient writhe—"and Made-

moiselle Herkenne came rushing into the room. ‘Where is Monsieur Dupuis?’ she said; ‘I want him directly.’ I told her you had gone out for a walk, and then I asked what was the matter, for she looked half-crazy. She said, ‘Monsieur Vidonze has gone away; he was to have staid some days, and he is gone;’ and then she hurried away again out of the room. I went after her, and I saw she was crying. I thought there had been a quarrel between them, but she says that almost before he spoke to her he began to open his letters; and then, as soon as he had read the first one, he rushed away, leaving the rest on the table. He snatched up his bag; so she thinks he is not coming back.”

“Well,” said Baconfoy, “I do not see much in that. I might do the same myself if I found that important business was waiting for me, and we know what a rough and ready fellow Vidonze is.”

“ You would not be so cruel,” said Pauline, “ I am sure you would not. Just think how this poor thing has been expecting him, and how often he has put off coming, and I know she had been getting all her accounts ready; and Valérie tells me Mademoiselle had ordered him such a beautiful little supper, and had sent to the hotel for a bottle of his favourite Burgundy. Oh, I think it is abominable to leave her so suddenly without giving any reason.”

Edmond had remained silent. “ Where is Mademoiselle Herkenne?”—he pushed away his plate as he spoke—“ it is perhaps about business she wants me.”

“ I will find out,” and Pauline rang the bell for Valérie.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ESCAPE.

THE Amblève was singing over the stones in its bed as merrily as ever ; brown cows were feeding on the little green island, and the sun was turning grass and stream and the vane of the black-capped towers of Montcour, across the water, into gold.

As Jeanne came down the flight of stone steps in front of the vine-clad inn, the sun fastened on her hair and made it into a golden glory across her broad forehead. She had slept two nights at the inn, instead of one, for the old ser-

vant had brought such a dismal account of the damp in the Château that Jeanne had yielded to her entreaty that the rooms might be well aired before she went home.

Jeanne had found plenty to do. She had been to see Monsieur le Curé, and had learned from him the state of the village with regard to health and sickness. Two of her special favourites—a husband and wife—she found lying side by side, too ill to move from bed, penniless; they had no child or anyone on whom they had a claim to nurse them. Then, after providing for the tendance of these sufferers, she had to talk to Jacques Cajot, deaf now, and much more infirm than when she had left the Château. He was, however, delighted to see her, and to find that she hoped in future to live on at Château Montcour. Auguste, too, expressed pleasure in his usual awkward fashion; but Charles avoided her.

As she came down the steps, Jeanne looked to see if Jacques Cajot was in the vine arbour. Yes, there he was, he did not lift his head, he was too deaf to hear the sound of her footsteps. There was a basket of potatoes and a bowl of water on the table, but his head was sunk on his breast, and his hands were idle.

“*Bon jour, Monsieur Jacques,*” the girl said; “is it not a bright, beautiful morning?”

“*Bon jour, Mademoiselle,*” he doffed his black straw hat, “it is fine weather; yes, yes; I am glad you are here to enjoy it. When shall we see Monsieur de Matagne and Monsieur Raoul?” His watery old eyes had an extra gleam of intelligence as he looked at Jeanne, and then at the bowl of potatoes.

“Monsieur Eugène will be here very soon.” Then she added, “Is there anything wrong with your brother Charles, Monsieur Cajot? he seems out of spirits,

he has not a word to say to me."

"No, Mademoiselle," he shook his head, "I am not aware of anything; but young people, you know"—he shrugged his shoulders—"pardon, Mam'zelle, you are young too; but then you are not foolish; you do not throw your words here—there—everywhere—*ma foi!* as they throw corn to chickens—for any stray passer-by to gather. Charles is heedless."

Jeanne smiled, and bade the old man good day. She did not like to ask questions, but she felt uncomfortable. Jacques was evidently vexed with his brother; what could Charles Cajot have been gossiping about? She remembered now that Barbe, the Curé's housekeeper, had said Charles was a chatterbox.

Jeanne went pensively across the plank-bridge over the brook—which here came gurgling down into the Amblève—and then strolled along the strip of green meadow on the left beside the river. A

little on in front, just below the Château, were the stepping-stones, unused for years, since the way up the almost perpendicular rock had become overgrown by the trees and underwood, which now clothed it to the garden of Château Montcour.

As Jeanne walked on, the high road which ran between the inn and the river became separated from the meadow by a screen of trees and bushes, so that she found herself in utter solitude as she neared the dark, mysterious bend where the stepping-stones seemed placed as a barrier against further progress.

All at once she saw a man coming towards her along the strip of green meadow. He was very tall, and he carried a bag; but as Jeanne came in sight of him at the bend made by the river, he was looking towards the high-road. She could not see his face. He turned towards the road, and taking off his hat

he wiped his face with his handkerchief.

Jeanne's heart seemed to stop beating. She crouched down into the grass, flinging herself backward, so that the turn of the bushes might shield her from sight ; for even at that distance she had recognised Antoine Vidonze.

She lay there some minutes, quite shocked by his sudden apparition, and then, finding he did not appear, she rose up again—he was out of sight. Evidently he had taken the high road, which was a shorter way to the inn than by following the green path beside the river.

Jeanne could not have told what she feared. She only knew that she had a most unreasoning terror of Antoine Vidonze ; and she was utterly defenceless against him at the Château ; with the exception of old toothless Baptiste, the gardener, there was not a man there. She could depend on no one but herself

for protection. She gave one moment to thought; she saw that, however quickly she might hasten by the road to the Chateau, when she came out in front of the inn, which she must pass, she would be exposed to the sight of Vidonze, and he would at once come after her. What should she do? Suddenly she remembered the day when Mademoiselle de Matagne had told her that as a child she had often reached the heights on which the Château stood by way of the stepping-stones.

Jeanne had no time to lose. Vidonze would soon get to the inn, and he might inquire of old Jacques and learn which direction she had taken. She quickly pulled off her shoes and stockings, and raising her black skirts she ventured boldly on to the stones. The water was low, and the stones were not very slippery. Jeanne was sure-footed, but once, just as she reached the opposite side of the river, she would

have slipped off a broken stone if she had not caught at a birch-tree which bent forward from the bank. Her heart sank as she saw the dense growth of underwood before her. She could not discover where to begin her upward climb. A little way on was a huge bush of broom, and in sheer desperation she forced her way through this; behind it she found broom-bushes so high as to reach her shoulders, but these were more yielding than the underwood.

It was exhausting work climbing the steep ascent and fighting against the close growth of the broom and other bushes. Sometimes she could not find where to place her feet; but she plunged upwards recklessly at the risk of being forced backwards by the resisting shoots and branches. But as she pushed a vigorous hazel-tree aside and swung herself up by its yielding branches, she saw to her joy a

path, narrow, overgrown, and frequently interrupted, but still a clue which showed she was on the right track.

Jeanne stood still and took breath. It was a moment of intense joy and thankfulness. She felt sure that Vidonze would find her out, and would seek her at the Château. In one of his letters Monsieur Hallez had bid her beware of the photographer, unless she meant to listen to him ; but now she was safe. He could not yet have reached the Château, for, though she had been some time making her way through the bushes, it was nearly a mile from the inn to Montcour going round, as he must, by the bridge beyond the church.

But it was a stiff climb yet before she reached the top, there was such an accumulation of stumps and brambles ; and when at length she found herself outside the fence at the top of the cliff, Jeanne's face and hands were

bleeding, and her gown was torn in many places. She had stopped half-way up as soon as she felt herself completely hidden, to put on her shoes and stockings, but the brambles had cruelly wounded her feet.

Jeanne had not lost her hardy habits, and she easily got over the fence; then, before she approached the house, she walked up and down the neglected garden, wiping her face and trying to give herself a more normal appearance.

But, spite of these efforts, when she reached the kitchen, and Marie looked up suddenly from the cap she was getting ready, the woman let fall her gauffering-irons with a cry of dismay.

“*Sainte Vierge—holy Saint Lambert !*
what has happened ? How pale Mademoiselle is, and she has blood on her cheek ! Why did Mademoiselle come home when Baptiste had got the horses and

carriage ready at last to fetch her and her baggage? and now she has fallen and hurt herself."

"I have scratched myself against some bushes," said Jeanne; "a little water will make that all right; but, Marie, there are bad people about in the village; you must not let anyone in to see me till Monsieur Eugène and Louis come back."

For Jeanne had been asking herself, while she climbed the steep rock, how she was to avoid Vidonze if he managed to get admitted to Château Montcour.

Marie looked surprised.

"It is not likely I should do that," she said. "Mademoiselle is thinking of the other day by the Meuse. Dame! but I thought Monsieur Eugène and Louis too were within call; and the gentleman said he was an old friend of Mademoiselle," she added with an aggrieved air.

"This person will say the same, no doubt" Jeanne said. "I mean that people who want to get into houses usually take some means like that of preventing suspicion. I believe I had better not see anyone, Marie; unless, indeed, it is a messenger from Monsieur Eugène."

For though Jeanne felt sure her flight from Dinant had been necessary, she was anxious about her charge.

Marie said, "Yes, yes," but she went on gauffering in silence. She liked Mademoiselle Jeanne; who could help it? but she did not care to take orders from her; and was it likely that she who had been *femme de chambre* to Madame de Matagne herself, would be so ignorant of propriety as to admit gentlemen visitors to the Château in Monsieur Eugène's absence.

But Jeanne had only just spoken in time.

With all Marie's caution, but for her

young mistress's warning she would probably have allowed Baptiste to answer the gate bell. Now, however, at its first sound, she waddled down to the great gates and reconnoitred through the wicket. She saw a tall, and, as she thought, a very handsome man, who spoke to her in a pleasant voice.

"Good day, my friend, I wish to see Mademoiselle de Matagne," he said; "Mademoiselle Jeanne, I mean."

"Ah! just like the other," Marie muttered. "I am sorry, Monsieur," she said politely, for Vidonze's manner had flattered her, "but Mademoiselle does not receive visitors to-day."

"Ah, but she will see me, I am an old friend," he said, confidently.

This was too much for Marie.

"No, no, Monsieur, it is not possible," and she shut down the wicket and waddled back to the Château.

The gate-bell sounded again, and

Marie went back, grumbling to herself, but she stood listening without opening the wicket.

“ My good friend,” she heard, “ be so kind as to tell Mademoiselle Jeanne that Monsieur Antoine Vidonze waits for her orders at the inn across the river; and say also that he hopes to stay there until he has had the honour of seeing her.”

CHAPTER XVI.

MADEMOISELLE HERKENNE COUNSELS.

EDMOND did not see Mademoiselle Herkenne. Valérie brought back word that the shop was closed for the night, and that Mademoiselle had gone to bed.

Elise had been shocked at her own outbreak. She had felt so happy at the sight of Vidonze that his abrupt departure had dashed down all the barriers she kept between her feelings and the outside world, and she had rushed up to Pauline's room, unconscious of what she did.

By degrees she became aware of her

uncontrolled state, and closing the shop, reckless of any disappointment to customers, she retreated to her own room to try and bring herself to reason.

At first she walked up and down like a caged panther, as ready as that wild animal to spring out and tear anything that might oppose itself to the torrent of her baulked passion ; but, as her strong will asserted itself, passion sank and its fumes abated ; she began to see things more clearly again.

After all, she could not be sure where Vidonze had gone, how many of his letters he had read. He had torn two open, and although she believed that the letter with the strange post-mark brought news of Jeanne, still it might be that Vidonze had not gone to seek her, and to the best of Elise's belief the girl was still in Dinant. There was no use in speaking to Edmond Dupuis till she had some certain news to tell.

She passed a miserable night, and the next morning, when Edmond came into the shop and asked if he could be of any service to her, she thanked him graciously and said that for the present she need not trouble him. Still the day passed feverishly; every now and then she pictured to herself Antoine and Jeanne together, for now that the girl knew Edmond was lost to her would she reject Vidonze? It was so impossible to her to believe that his love could be refused.

Elise watched Edmond keenly as he passed in and out, and she felt sure that he too was in suspense; she had watched him closely for some days, and she had guessed at his search for Jeanne. More than once she had felt a strange impulse to speak to him, but she did not know how to approach the subject.

Next morning brought her a letter. She saw Vidonze's writing, and she tore it open, but, as she read, her face con-

tracted, her eyes closed, till only a line of gleaming darkness showed between the lashes, and her lips drawn back tightly disclosed the white teeth clenched together.

“ Devil !” she muttered, “ she is a fair devil ; but she shall not have him if I die for it.”

She flung herself back in her chair, and clasped her forehead in her cold fingers. Then she took up the letter and read it again.

“ I have found Jeanne Lahaye, and you will know how happy this makes me. I told you I had a sure friend who would warn me of her return to Château Montcour, which is her home. She has come back quite suddenly, it seems, but there is no getting to see her ; and the old fool of a landlord at the inn here says that she will not be likely to admit visitors till Monsieur de Matagne comes back. But I cannot wait for this, I burn to see her.

Come to me at once, you are so clever that your wits will devise a means of bringing us together. It will be easy for you to gain admittance by saying you bring a message from the old man, De Matagne, who is now near Bouvignes. Start as soon as you receive this; I count on you as a true friend to help me."

She slowly folded up the letter; and then she sat waiting for Edmond Dupuis. She knew that he would go sketching on so fine a morning.

"Yes, I will see her, my friend," she said, "but not to bear love-tokens from you. *Mon Dieu!* it is too much. She shall do as I bid her, or she shall listen to Edmond Dupuis; she has had her own way too long."

At last she heard Edmond's footsteps, and she came forward to the glass door outwardly as calm and unmoved as if no trouble was throbbing in her heart.

"Good day, Monsieur Dupuis," she

said ; “ can you spare me five minutes this morning,” he followed her into the room. “ I have been looking through the new views, and there has been some mistake about the set you wished for, they have been taken small instead of large.”

“ I had forgotten Mademoiselle. I will look at them this evening and let you know.” He bowed, and was going out.

“ There is something else;” she went forward and closed the door.

Edmond looked at her and he stood still. The expression of hatred which still lingered in her dark eyes made him uneasy.

“ I have heard from Monsieur Vidonze this morning,” she said, in slow distinct tones, “ he tells me he has found Mademoiselle Lahaye. I daresay you know he has been seeking her all these months ; you know his love for her ; now he has found her he will not let her go again.”

"What do you mean, Mademoiselle?" he said, with an angry impulse to throw the blame of this disaster on the person who revealed it. "Where is Mademoiselle Lahaye?"

Elise looked at him with a smile of triumph.

"You may well ask, Monsieur Dupuis. When last you saw this young lady she was not so far off as she is at present; but your visit frightened her away from Dinant. Do not look so startled, Monsieur Dupuis, I have not been so blind as my little friend upstairs was. Mademoiselle Jeanne has gone off to the old lonely Château on the hills by the Amblève. Ah, you did not know how near we were to your Jeanne, either you or Monsieur Vidonze, the day we drove there. She is alone now, but Monsieur Vidonze will not leave her alone long; he will marry her, Monsieur, whether she likes it or not; he has the law on his side, he has

her grandmother's consent, you know. Have *you* any objection?"

Edmond was taken by surprise; he answered yet more angrily, for he could not quiet his own fears. "No priest would marry them, you are talking nonsense, Mademoiselle."

"Very well, then there is no more to be said." There was a pause, Edmond stood frowning, and Mademoiselle Herkenne tapped the table carelessly with her fingers. She looked up suddenly. "You have never been overkind to me, Monsieur Dupuis, and I do not know why I should go out of my way to befriend you. Do you suppose," she turned on him, her eyes gleaming with the passion that was mastering her, "that I do not read you clearly, and the sham you carry on with that little dupe upstairs? It is shameful to see a man in the prime of his youth and vigour selling himself to a woman he despises,

when if he had only a true man's courage he might have happiness with a girl who worships him, and who would gladly defy the world for his love."

Edmond stood stupefied by the passionate words which seemed hurled on him like missiles ; but this roused him.

" What wild talk this is, Mademoiselle ? You are saying what is not true."

" Bah, bah !—Oh, *mon Dieu !*" she said, clasping her hands passionately, " and you pretend to love Jeanne Lahaye and cannot read her better than that. Do you not know that a woman's ' No ' in love always means ' Yes ? ' Can I not make you see that all this time your Jeanne is fretting her heart because you have not asked her to be yours ? A woman wants proofs, not words, and have you ever said, ' Jeanne, I will give up my comfortable home and all my wife's money

if you will go away with me where no one knows our past?"'

"Silence," he said, sternly. "I tell you again you say what is not true."

"It is true. A woman knows a woman best. I tell you, Jeanne Lahaye loves you; will sacrifice everything for you; and will you give up nothing for her? Ah, you do not love her."

She stopped, partly checked by her own vehemence and partly because she could not understand the look of horror in his face. Her scorn increased, for she thought he shrank from the sacrifice she had proposed.

"After all," she said, "you have done the worst, Monsieur Dupuis. You, a decorous married man, have pursued Jeanne Lahaye, and have persevered in trying to rouse her love for you. You have spoiled the girl's life, and now you will leave her to become the property of another man. Poor deserted creature! she is likely

enough to give Monsieur Vidonze a hearing."

She paused again, but he stood silent.

"Well, Monsieur," she said, with bitter sarcasm, "I must ask pardon. I thought you loved this girl, and would not care to see her married; so I gave you a warning of what is going on. I am mistaken. Now I range myself on the side of Monsieur Vidonze; he asks me to join him at once. I go, and it will be hard if between us we cannot carry out his wishes."

Then with a sudden change of tone, she said—

"Has Monsieur any orders to give me about the photographs, or can I serve him in any way before I start for Château Montcour?"

He looked at her steadily. She had dealt him so many home-thrusts that he felt tongue-tied and conscience-stricken, and yet, though he had no words for self-justification, he felt he must defend

Jeanne's purity, he must speak for her to this black-tongued woman.

"It does not signify what you say of me but be careful how you speak of Mademoiselle Lahaye. It is impossible for you to understand her purity and innocence. If I were the devil you would make me, she would turn from me with horror."

"Innocence!" she laughed; "and you believe in innocence. Do you not know that a woman's innocence consists in not being found out?"

"Be silent," he spoke, sternly. "I do not wish to judge you harshly, but it is sad to hear a woman utter such thoughts about one who is so pure and good. I am ashamed to have listened to you."

She did not answer him; she shrank a little back into the shadow of a curtained recess behind her. Hardened as she was, she could not bear to feel

that Edmond Dupuis had read her rightly.

But till he had left her and was on the road to Anseremme—for he had begun to paint again of late—he did not find the key to Mademoiselle Herkenne's strange behaviour; then Pauline's hints came back, and he saw plainly that this woman did care for Vidonze, and was therefore willing to risk everything to prevent a marriage between him and Jeanne. He had never liked Mademoiselle Herkenne; he had thought her a proud, cold, repelling woman, solely occupied with herself and her duties. Only a vehement hatred of Jeanne, or a vehement love for the photographer, could explain this sudden outbreak. This last thought made his heart beat quickly. It was alarming to think what her jealousy might urge Mademoiselle Herkenne to do.

Edmond walked with bent head; he was humbled at last. Elise's words and

her suggestions had shown him the brink on which he stood, on which he had been standing blindfold ever since he told himself that he had a right still to love Jeanne.

He saw, too, the cruel selfishness of his second interview. It would have been easier for Jeanne to forget him, he argued, if she thought him faithless, and yet he had forced the knowledge of his love on her, and had tried to kindle hers. He felt like a criminal. He loved Jeanne as much as ever, but he began at last to consider her feelings as well as his own.

He did not think of his wife, or, to speak more truly, he put the thought of her aside; it was humbling enough to feel how he had sinned against Jeanne. She had given him all the treasure of her first love, and in return he had tried to turn her love into a sin. She had told him this, but her words had not then reached his understanding. He shrank from approach-

ing her again, but there was no time to lose, indeed he had no time for reflection; it seemed to him that the only plan was to hurry to Château Montcour and bid Jeanne place herself at once under the protection either of the Curé, Monsieur Hallez, or to return to Monsieur de Matagne. Yes, he would start at once.

He turned and walked rapidly back to Dinant. It would be wiser to say nothing to either Jules or Pauline of his intended journey, and, indeed, in his present mood, he shrank from the sight of his wife.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN AGREEMENT.

WHEN Monsieur Baconfoy came to look for Pauline he found her sobbing as if she had never left off since the night before, when she had gone to bed at last against her will, crying out that something must have happened to Edmond.

Baconfoy had been troubled and puzzled too yesterday by his cousin's disappearance. First they had waited supper, and then when it grew late, and still he did not come, Baconfoy had gone out to make inquiries ; he could only learn that Monsieur Dupuis

had been seen going to the railway-station. In the meantime Valérie told her mistress that some one had told her that Mademoiselle Herkenne had gone away for a few days, and that one of the young ladies at the book-shop opposite had promised to see to the business during her absence. Valérie soon found that her mistress could not listen to her; so she went to Monsieur Baconfoy.

“Something has happened to Monsieur Vidonze, Monsieur,” she said, “Monsieur Dupuis had a talk with Mademoiselle Herkenne in the morning, and I believe they have gone off together to help him.”

Baconfoy grunted in reply.

This idea seemed probable though not satisfactory; but Jules felt very uneasy when next morning there was no letter from Edmond.

He did not know what to do with Pauline; she wept on and on as if she would weep herself away. She made no

complaint, only once, when the kind genial man was trying to cheer and comfort her, she said sadly,

“It is my own fault, I have no right to expect anything else,” and then she went back to her tears.

“*Morbleu!*” Baconfoy said, in his bluff way, as he stood by the window, looking now and then at the little figure crouched in a corner of the sofa, “this is too hard for me, I cannot stand it; I must fetch Madame Boulotte.”

He went quietly out of the room, and bidding Valérie take care of her mistress, and say that he would be back to supper, he started by the next train for Rimay.

It need not be said, at this date, that Madame Boulotte was a notable woman, a housekeeper of the first rank; when her maid came and said a gentleman wished to see her, she was deep in the mysteries of plum-jam. Now everyone knows that

plum-jam, if it is to be clear and not like glue, and, in short, worthy of such a reputation as Madame Boulotte's, must not be treated carelessly, and, above all, must not be left to the mercy of a thick-head like Marie, who would let it boil till the best half of it remained fixed to the sides and bottom of the preserving-pan.

"Go away, Marie!" said Madame, impatiently; "send the gentleman away too. It is impossible I can see anyone?"

"But, Madame, he is from Dinant; Madame Dupuis is in trouble, and the gentleman says only you can help her."

"Is it Monsieur Dupuis?" She began to listen.

"No, Madame, it is the stout, handsome gentleman, who sometimes comes to see Madame."

Madame Boulotte's face was already pink, but now it glowed, and each small ear looked like a rosy shell.

"Eh ! *Mon Dieu !*" she said, "and the jam—? well it is done, give me a teacup, Marie. Tell Monsieur I will be with him directly."

And quickly the soft dimpled hands, that looked as if they only took care of one another, ladled out the shining red conserve into the pots that stood ready on the table; then she dipped her fingers into water, pulled her bibbed apron off her well-fitting black gown, gave a few touches with her fingers to her hair, and went to the front room to greet her visitor, as fresh as a daisy.

"How charming she looks !" her visitor thought, "not a hair out of place, so composed and tranquil ! surely a woman like this would never sob or do anything foolish ? certainly all women are not alike."

And as he took the widow's soft plump hand into his, Monsieur Baconfoy pressed it gallantly, wishing it were but

possible to take a wife on trial for a week, instead of venturing a life-time on an uncertainty.

Madame Boulotte was very gracious and smiling in her welcome, but she looked grave at his account of Pauline. Then when he ended she shrugged her shoulders.

“*Mon Dieu,*” she said, “that is the way with you men, you make women fools, and then you keep them so, and when they show their folly you cry out for help. She is a silly little hysterical chit, and if instead of pity you had given her some cold water and left her to herself, she would have got better at once.”

“I yield, Madame, I yield she is all you say; but the water—*ma foi*, no—I am a fossil, Madame, but I could not throw water over a woman”—he looked mischievous; “only come back with me to Dinant, and I will learn from your ways

with the poor child how to do better in future."

Madame Boulotte was flattered, but she tried to keep a grave face.

"I cannot well leave home, I am expecting Antoine," she said. "He told me he was going to Dinant, and would come on here to spend some hours with me."

"Aha!" he rubbed his huge hands, "that is part of our mystery, Madame. Your brother arrived at Dinant, and departed again immediately—no one knows why; and now his housekeeper and Dupuis have also disappeared. Perhaps you can help to unravel the mystery—it is beyond me altogether;" and Monsieur Baconfoy looked helplessly at the widow.

"Bah—bah! Monsieur, is it possible that you have lived so long in the world, and that you still believe in mysteries? they do not exist. If there is anything wrong you may be sure that housekeeper

of my brother's is at the bottom of it. I have never liked her; she is a schemer. I believe she will marry Antoine one of these days."

"By-the-bye, has your brother ever heard of Mademoiselle Lahaye?"

Madame Boulotte shook her head.

"No, and I do not think he ever will. Between ourselves, Monsieur, I fancy Jeanne has gone into a convent; and for many reasons it was the wisest thing she could do. Well, then, if there is no chance of seeing Antoine here, I will go with you."

"I thank you Madame, a thousand times, it is most kind."

While Madame Boulotte went to make her preparations, Monsieur Baconfoy felt in an unusual state of excitement; there was even a certain fluttering at his heart that he had not before observed; and instead of sitting down and quietly waiting till the lady appeared, he walked up and down

the dainty little room singing softly to himself—actually singing, a practice which he had scarcely indulged in since he was a boy.

But, as the opening of a door overhead gave warning of her approach, his singing ceased, and a look of perplexity crossed his usually tranquil face.

He had not for years past taken sole charge of a lady, and he did not feel quite fitted for the post; but when Madame Boulotte at last came down in her new autumn bonnet, the black lace made such a charming frame to her face, and the bunch of wheat ears on one side was in such admirable contrast to the graceful black drapery round her shoulders, that he forgot everything in the enjoyment of contemplating so pleasant a picture.

“What a handsome creature she must have been!” he said to himself. “But better now than when she was younger—yes, there is no doubt—your mellow apple

is far preferable to tart June fruit. Madame," he said, "your bonnet is too charming. It is surely from Paris."

"Yes, Monsieur, the bonnet is from Paris; but after all it is only a bonnet." She tossed her head as much as to say, "Have you no praise for the face inside it."

"*Mon Dieu!*" thought Baconfoy, "what have I said wrong? I thought that was the right thing to say."

However the widow was soon all smiles again, and by the time they reached Dinant Monsieur Jules had quite forgotten Pauline and her troubles.

"Madame," he said, impressively, as he handed her from the carriage, "Madame, so pleasant a journey might have gone on for ever before I should have wished to stop."

Madame Boulotte smiled; she remembered that there were plenty of ears and eyes around them.

"Monsieur is poetical," she said, with a laugh; "and I am so prosaic as to feel that it is just supper-time;" but at the same time she gave him so charming a smile that he was satisfied.

When Pauline saw the widow coming in at the door, she flew to her, and laying her head on Madame Boulotte's plump shoulder, she burst into fresh tears, clinging to her as if she were her mother.

It did Baconfoy's heart good, however, to note that the widow said no word about cold water, nor did she either lecture or leave Pauline to herself. Instead, she folded her in a motherly embrace, and drawing her to the sofa sat down beside the poor girl, and gently kissed her and cooed over her, till gradually Pauline's sobs ceased. Then the widow nodded her dismissal to Baconfoy.

"Come back to supper in half an hour," she said.

He went to smoke a cigar on the bridge. “*Mon Dieu !*” he said, as he leaned over the parapet, “ what the devil is coming to you, Jules, that you should have turned into a squire of dames ? it is a folly. But yet, what a wonderful woman this is ; while I stood looking at that poor child, feeling that I would give all I had to comfort her, she only grew worse ; and here comes Madame Boulotte, who does not profess to care for her, and she is at once mistress of the situation. I believe she will get Pauline all right by supper-time. It was, perhaps, the kissing ; *ma foi !* there she has the advantage over her,” and then he found himself reflecting on those kisses, and he blushed like a schoolboy.

Pauline was at least calm and quiet when supper-time came, and after Madame Boulotte had herself helped her to bed, the widow came back to Monsieur Baconfoy with a troubled face.

“ Monsieur,” she said, as she seated

herself, “are you very fond of your cousin Edmond?”

“Yes, Madame, I do love the boy dearly; he is unfortunately the only person who has any claim on me for fondness.” He gave her a glance which he intended to be full of meaning.

“Well,” she said, throwing her head back, and Baconfoy thought how well this action became her, “it is not pleasant to own one has been wrong, but I must do so. I too liked him; now, Monsieur, I believe that your cousin is a villain, and that the poor little Pauline is an angel.”

Baconfoy reddened; he drew himself up, and his lips closed tightly.

“Villain is a strong word, Madame, and your angel is after all a dear little goose sometimes.”

“Monsieur,” the widow too sat upright, her clasped hands looking very white and charming on her black silk lap, “I have been married myself, and I know what a

woman can bear. *Mon Dieu!*" her eyes flashed, "if my husband had treated me as that poor child has been treated, I—I should have left him—I should have had an act of separation," she clenched her right hand.

"Would she have scratched him?" thought Baconfoy, his eyes travelled to the widow's pink nails, and he shivered a little.

"Pauline has been telling tales of her husband, has she?" he said severely.

"No, Monsieur, she has not complained, but I have questioned her closely. It is quite clear to me that this acquaintance of hers made at the Hospice, this Jeanne, is Jeanne Lahaye, and your precious cousin knew it too; and while this poor child has been racking her brains to know how she has vexed her husband, it has not been her fault at all; the truth is that he is in love with this girl, of whom he ought not even to think. There, Mon-

sieur, there is your mystery," she flung out her hand in disdain.

Baconfoy's brain turned round ; Pauline had spoken to him of her friend Jeanne, and he had puzzled over the striking change in Edmond, yet it had never occurred to him to connect the two things. Truly, he thought, Madame Boulotte was a wonderful creature.

He bowed profoundly.

"Madame, you are a witch ; if this is so, it is a bad affair, but still it is not certain. After all," he said, hesitatingly, "if the poor fellow did love Mam'zelle Jeanne so dearly, it was but natural that the sight of her—if he did see her—should upset him for a while."

Madame Boulotte instantly looked a picture of matronly severity.

"Monsieur Baconfoy, I am surprised, do you then take Edmond's part ? A man should love his wife ; it is his duty. Is it not so?"

It had never occurred to Madame Boulotte, who had been married at sixteen to a man of sixty, to love her husband, but then she was judging others, not herself, and this, of course, made a great difference. She looked so displeased, that Baconfoy felt he was "treading on eggs."

"It is very sad, no, I do not take his part; how could I against you?" This in his most insinuating manner. "Come, come, Madame, you are too tender-hearted to judge poor Edmond harshly,"—he crossed over to the sofa and sat down beside her, though he felt more nervous at the proceeding than he had ever felt in his life—"But—but is it possible, Madame, you do not see that you are more to me than Edmond Dupuis or—or anyone else." He laid his hand almost timidly on her plump fingers.

She smiled most graciously, and bent her head, but then she shook it gently, and got up from the sofa.

"I can only think of that poor child upstairs. Help me, Monsieur, to give her back her husband, and then—then—well, we will finish our talk when it is not quite so late in the evening."

She curtseyed, waved her hand, and left the room before Baconfoy had made up his mind how to detain her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ COALS OF FIRE.”

OLD Jacques Cajot was sitting in doors this morning. The sun was glittering on the Amblève; but to the old man who now walked feebly, and whose blood flowed yet more slowly, the bright air felt chill and threatened rheumatism. Sitting in doors, he had noted with displeased eyes that Charles was having a long talk below the window with the photographer. Old Jacques seemed dull and insensible to all that passed around him, but the faculty of observation, for which he had been remarkable, still remained.

He remembered that he had never liked this photographer, and this morning Barbe, the Curate's housekeeper, had brought Monsieur Jacques a present of balm-leaves, and had stayed for a talk. She had really come to tell him a startling piece of news.

She had heard that the red-bearded stranger had gone up to Château Montcour and had been refused admittance, though he had said he was an old friend of Mademoiselle Jeanne's; it was very strange. Barbe had gone away shaking her head. She hoped all was well, but it would be a good thing, she thought, when Monsieur Eugène returned to the Château.

And now Jacques sat with his head on his breast, slowly piecing together, as an old woman pieces the patterns of her patch-work, the many little tokens which seemed to connect the photographer with Mademoiselle Jeanne. It was strange that as soon as he arrived she should have gone

away from the Coq d'Or in that sudden manner, without even saying Good-bye, sending Baptiste for her luggage and to pay her reckoning.

"I do not like it," Jacques thought, "I will not have Charles talk so much with that man, Charles is young and giddy, and he may be led astray; he has gone about this morning smiling and rubbing his hands without cause. I am not easy in my mind. This stranger may mean mischief to Mademoiselle Jeanne."

He raised his head and listened. He could just distinguish a sound of wheels; then a carriage came in sight, and stopped before the inn. The old man had long ago given up the habit of going forward to receive guests; but his eyes brightened with almost vivid interest when he saw Charles hand out a lady, the only person in the carriage.

Jacques, however, did not like ladies who

travelled alone, and he saw that this one had no more luggage than the small bag she carried in her hand. Something in her figure recalled a memory, but from where he sat he could not make out her face. She passed into the house, and Jacques sat still thinking.

“Charles does not get wiser,” he shook his head; “he welcomed that woman as if she was a well-to-do traveller.” He closed his eyes till the sound of wheels roused him again.

This carriage stopped at the other door round the angle of the house; but very soon Auguste came down the steps just above the vine arbour.

He was frowning, and his lower lip was pushed out. Jacques knew by this that something was going wrong. But he did not question Auguste, he knew that his brother was coming to seek counsel of him. He only turned his least deaf ear towards him.

"There is something wrong, my brother; something I do not understand," Auguste spoke sulkily, "first comes this red-bearded *vaurien* with whom the foolish Charles is besotted, and next comes that tall woman who came in the summer, and of whom I thought no good even then. She asked for this Monsieur Antoine, and they are now shut up together in the *salon*. And now, this minute, has arrived the pleasant-faced young man who came with these two in the summer; but this time he has not his wife with him. Well, I receive him, and I am telling him his friends are upstairs, when that foolish Charles says :

"'It is impossible he can go there, Monsieur and Madame desire to be left alone;' they cannot be disturbed; and my new arrival cries out, in a hurried way :

"'I too wish to be alone. You need

not speak of my coming to your other guests;’ and then he orders supper to be served privately in the little *salle*. All this is insupportable, my brother. Secrets —mysteries; such things never happened in this house before.”

He thrust his hands behind him, and stood doggedly looking at the river.

Jacques thought these two arrivals mysterious, but he smiled at his brother’s indignation.

“It is possible that this last one is not after all a friend of the others,” he said; “we see here how people strike up a chance acquaintance of a few days which dies away again. This meeting is probably an accident.”

Auguste shook his head.

“There is something in it,” he said, “or this last one would not have looked so angry; besides, he too asked me the best way of reaching the Château, and that

was also your photographer's first question. *Mon Dieu!* it is a most strange affair. Listen here, Jacques, I believe they both want to marry Mademoiselle Jeanne."

Jacques smiled, as he often did at his rough brother's grievances.

" Be sure the lady is not of their opinion, my friend. You have only to be patient, Auguste, and the meaning of all this will appear; meantime Mademoiselle Jeanne is quite safe, for Barbe says she refuses to see visitors in Monsieur Eugène's absence; but there is the bell, Auguste, you must not depend on Charles."

Mademoiselle Herkenne had seen Edmond Dupuis at the station at Comblain, and had carefully avoided him. She had rapidly secured a carriage, and had arrived first at the Coq d'or. His appearance, however, had raised her spirits; it was plain, she thought, that he had taken her advice, and meant to carry Jeanne away from the Château.

She had now a decided proof to offer to Antoine Vidonze, supposing that her own eloquence failed.

Charles Cajot was in a flutter of delight as he ushered her up to the *salon*. Monsieur Antoine, as Vidonze called himself at the inn, had given him notice of the lady's arrival, and Charles so keenly relished having a secret all to himself now that he had got used to it, that he said not a word to the elder brothers, though it was with difficulty he kept it to himself; he could hardly contain his satisfaction at knowing more than they did, and at the prospect of seeing again the tall, goddess-like creature who had seemed to him fit to be worshipped.

Elise walked before him haughtily, she thought Vidonze might have received her himself, and when Charles threw open the door of the *salon*, she saw that it was empty, and she frowned.

“ Tell Monsieur Antoine, the tall gentle-

man who is staying here, I am waiting for him," she said, and then she seated herself. Charles bowed low.

"She is divine. What eyes! What a figure! An empress must be like that," and he sighed with admiration.

Vidonze was not far off; he had been so impatient for Mademoiselle Herkenne's arrival that he had lingered about the inn all the morning. He did not share Monsieur Baconfoy's distrust of women, but he had no reverence for them. His housekeeper was the first woman whose mental attributes had impressed him; the first to whom he had ever looked for help or counsel. His feelings for Jeanne Lahaye had been of an entirely opposite nature. And Mademoiselle Herkenne's reserve had helped his belief in her; he had such unbounded confidence in her resources, that he felt she would either plead his cause successfully with Jeanne, or that she would

win him a way to plead for himself.

Such meetings as this one between Elise and the photographer are happening every day ; but the contrast between the man's excitement as he hurried upstairs to pave, as he thought, the way to his long-sought happiness, and the mixture of scorn and passionate love in the woman who sat waiting to receive him, promised a not easy carrying out of the plan which, to Vidonze's mind, seemed already half accomplished.

Still he knew enough of women to be aware that Mademoiselle Herkenne must be soothed and flattered ; and the sight of her troubled face confirmed this feeling.

“ How kind you are to come at once ! ” he said, warmly shaking her hand ; “ how can I thank you enough. You are the best friend I ever had. But there is no friend like a woman.”

She sat still, but her heart beat

thick with pleasure. She gave him a grateful smile.

“ You must tell me, Monsieur, why you sent for me? What have you to tell me?”

This was not the answer he wanted, and his manner changed.

“ It is for you to tell me what I shall do,” he said; “ I have already told you all I can; I have at last found Jeanne Lahaye, and no one knows better than you do how anxiously all this time I have looked for her. *Ma foi!* if I had not been sharp enough to employ spies I might have gone on for months longer.” He seemed to expect her applause, but as she remained silent he went on. “ Well, I have called at the Château over there,” he pointed towards Montcour, “ and she has refused to see me. I expected this, so it counts for nothing. Now, look here, Mademoiselle, when we parted some time ago, I spoke foolishly to Jeanne; I was

rough and impatient—too impetuous a lover, I suppose,” he laughed, “and the girl was frightened. I want you to tell her that this was the effect of my deep love for her, but that I have seen my folly, and that if she will only give me another hearing she shall find me the gentlest and the most devoted of lovers, willing to do all she wishes; but—” a glance at his listener’s face had shown him her lips curled in intense scorn—“Why am I teaching you when you know so much better than I do what to do and what to say?” he said impatiently.

Mademoiselle Elise sat thinking. She did not look up, she feared her secret might creep into her eyes and betray her to this man whom she loved so passionately, and who was stabbing her by every word he spoke; and to betray herself—while he was so full of love for Jeanne—would be, her keen wisdom told her, the greatest folly of her life.

When she spoke her voice was pleasanter and softer than usual.

"On the contrary, Monsieur, it seems to me that you quite know how to win a woman if she is to be won; but I fear Mademoiselle Jeanne has already given her love to some one else."

Vidonze stared at her, then he said, roughly, and his face grew flaming red; "What do you know about her, have you been listening to my sister's gossip?"

Elise drew herself up.

"I have not seen Madame Boulotte," she said, coldly.

"I beg your pardon," he tried to speak soothingly, "but you have plainly heard something; what have you heard? You have never seen Mademoiselle Lachaye, and you know nothing about her."

She looked at him—now she could smile pleasantly—with calm pity at the ruffled face, which grew at last furious under her steady glance.

“What do you mean, what do you know?” he said, rudely; “I like plain speaking.”

“You must tell me where to begin, Monsieur. Shall I talk about the young lady herself? or about her meetings with Monsieur Edmond Dupuis?”

He flung away from her impetuously, and threw up his arms.

“Women are all alike,” he said; “I see you love scandal as well as the rest do. I thought you were above it.”

“Monsieur,” she said, firmly, “please to understand that in all I say I relate facts, plain facts. I myself saw Jeanne Lahaye go up to Edmond Dupuis in the High Street of Dinant. He shrank from her at first, but then they went away together. Their next meeting was in the house where she lived—for she has been living lately beside the Meuse, near Bouvignes—and I have met him constantly coming from the direction of her

house, and to keep matters quiet she has formed a friendship with my poor little friend, Madame Dupuis, who has actually asked her to come and see her.”

She stopped, for Vidonze suddenly grasped her wrist with a force that hurt her, but she did not move.

“And you knew that Jeanne was so near and you did not at once summon me?”

“Why should I? I saw enough to show me that the girl is not worth your love. Why should I give you the pain of witnessing her unworthy conduct?”

Vidonze let go her hand. “Pardon me—you surprised me;” he stood biting his lip; he tried to think, but the shock had sent the blood to his brain, and he felt giddy and confused.

“There is a mistake somewhere,” he said at last, “you do not understand Jeanne Lahaye. She is not clever, like

you, but she is true. She would not rob another woman of her husband's love. I can see it all. She knew Dupuis formerly, and she was pleased to see her old friend again. Why should she not visit his wife, I ask you? What is the crime in this?"

He looked sternly at her.

"That is what I asked myself, Monsieur; but after I had seen the meeting between Monsieur Dupuis and Mademoiselle Lahaye, Madame Dupuis came to me in great trouble, and said her friend refused to visit her."

Vidonze hesitated, then he said—

"There is nothing in that. Jeanne is in a different position now, and she might feel a difficulty in visiting Madame Dupuis. Old De Matagne might object; there are a hundred reasons besides. If you knew Jeanne as well as I do, you would not think it likely that she could care for that silly, little woman."

Mademoiselle Herkenne shrugged her shoulders.

"As you will. I have done my duty, Monsieur. I could not let you blindly offer yourself to a woman who loves another man, and who receives him, though he is married. My wish was to spare you disappointment." She had determined not to speak of Edmond's arrival at the inn; it would come as a fresh shock when Vidonze found it out himself.

The photographer stood gnawing at his moustache. He believed far more of his housekeeper's story than he chose to show; but the old lawless spirit which since his prosperity had been kept in check by external causes, now broke loose. He turned suddenly on Mademoiselle Herkenne.

"Do not you be faint-hearted," he said, "and I must win. She will marry me, if it be only to be revenged on Dupuis. I count on you as my best friend in the affair. You can easily get to see her by

saying you come from the old man at Bouvignes, say he is ill. Jeanne may refuse to listen to me at first, but remember I have her grandmother's consent to marry her. You and I together should be able to manage a girl.” He laughed, as though he meant only a joke; but Elise saw a fierce, determined gleam in his eyes. Next minute he had taken her hand. He pressed it between his. “My good, true friend,” he said, “I depend wholly on you in this affair—you will go to the Château early to-morrow, and you will see her, and all will be arranged.”

She smiled, but he could not understand her silence; he wished he could send her at once to see Jeanne; but he knew she must have rest and refreshment, and also time for thought; he said this as he left her.

Elise sat for some minutes motionless, with a scowl on her dark face; but this

soon changed into a look of despair.

"Will nothing cure him of this mad folly?" she thought. "There is yet the hope that Edmond Dupuis may win Jeanne to his wish; surely that will turn Antoine's love to hate." And as she recalled the way in which he had spoken of Jeanne, she felt that her own hatred to the girl was as strong as her love for him.

"Some way shall be found to get rid of her," she said; "it is my last chance for happiness. I will run any risk."

CHAPTER XIX.

A CHOICE.

AT first the change of scene, and then the excitement of her escape from Vidonze, had helped Jeanne against her sorrow. Seeing the familiar faces too in the village, and the joy that her return brought to them, had warmed and cheered her. She had been to see every part of the grounds, and she had lectured Baptiste about his neglect of the garden, and had seen that the rooms were fit to receive Monsieur Eugène, and now that all was ready, she felt dull and listless; life stretched itself out before her in unbroken

monotony, with no earthly hope to draw her onward.

She almost smiled at her fear of Vidonze, but her dislike to him was unaltered, it was so intense that she felt she could not bear even to see him, and it would be terrible to have to listen to his love. She had never forgotten his tyrannical conduct at their last meeting, but Jeanne had grown much older since then; association with Mademoiselle de Matagne and her friends, and also contact with the outside world, had developed her judgment, and she asked herself if it were likely that Vidonze would persist in persecuting her now that she had shown her dislike so plainly. For she had taken no notice of his message; she thought silence signified refusal, and that in her solitary position it was better not to be drawn into any negotiation with such a man as the photographer.

So this day had gone on wearily and

drearly. She was walking up and down her favourite path on the edge of the cliff, the trees became barer every day now as the leaves dropped from them, and she got frequent glimpses of the river, sparkling over its grey stones as it swept under the dark cliff beyond the Château.

As she turned to the house again she saw Marie coming towards her.

The woman's broad face looked even broader than usual, she was grinning with delight.

"Mademoiselle has plenty of visitors to-day," she said; "there has been the one who calls himself Monsieur Antoine Vidonze; and then some time after I sent him away, there comes that other who came when we were at Dinant. *Mon Dieu!* he was disturbed when he found he could not see Mademoiselle; he said it was for Mademoiselle's business, not his own; poor gentleman! he begged so hard; he is not so fine a man

as the other, but he seems more amiable ; I was sorry to send him away."

" You could do nothing else ;" but Jeanne felt that a fresh gloom had fallen on her sadness. Edmond had broken his promise, and was trying to see her ; and now where could she hope to find peace or safety ? " Life is over for me," she thought ; " so long as I live I add to that poor wife's unhappiness, and I suppose I am a constant disappointment to Monsieur Eugène, and yet I could not marry Monsieur Raoul ; poor little Pauline has taught me how wretched a marriage is where there is no love."

As she walked up and down she thought she would ask Monsieur Hallez to come to Château Montcour ; he had probably by this time written to her to Dinant ; but so much had happened lately that could not be discussed in writing, and she clung to the good priest as if he were

really her father; yes, she would write to him, he was her only adviser now.

“If Monsieur Eugène were less sensitive I would tell him too,” she thought, “but it would make him ill if he knew how really unhappy I am.”

Meantime Elise Herkenne had crossed the bridge, and had taken the road which led up to the Château. Her face showed no sign of her fiery interview with Vidonze, except that perhaps her lips were more tightly shut, her nostrils more dilated than usual. She kept her eyes half closed while she mounted the hill, projecting her thoughts forward into the coming interview. It would be a difficult affair to manage, but in a matter of calculation or intrigue Elise loved difficulty; she knew that she had the special faculty of threading her way through perplexities which would baffle a simpler mind.

She had seen Edmond Dupuis leave the

inn, and, though he had not returned, she felt sure, from her talk with Charles Cajot, that he would not be admitted at Château Montcour; but his presence in the village gave her additional strength against Jeanne. Surely, if she painted on one side the vehemence of Vidonze's pursuit, and the reckless measures of which he was capable; and then pleaded Edmond's love, and showed how utterly impossible it was that he could ever be happy with Pauline, Jeanne would agree to fly with her lover; his coming told Mademoiselle Herkenne that she had been right, and that Edmond's words to her had been mere words after all.

“Fear and love,” she said, “are the two strongest motives with a woman, and this girl must yield when they are both used to move her.”

But she looked calm and unruffled when Marie’s blinking green eyes showed

through the wicket in answer to her summons.

“ I have come from Dinant,” she said ; “ Monsieur de Matagne is very ill, and I have a message from him to Mademoiselle.”

She did not ask to enter, she felt so sure that Jeanne would admit her when she heard her news.

“ Ill ! *Mon Dieu !* and we left him so much better ! When did he grow worse ?” the old servant said eagerly, opening the gate.

“ Yesterday ; but do not delay, the doctor told me I must not lose a minute in telling Mademoiselle.”

Elise had spoken in the broad Walloon dialect used by working people, and Marie believed her to be the doctor’s servant.

She wrung her hands in dismay.

“ Ah ! the misery of it !” she said ; “ and only that stupid Eulalie to

make his *tisanes* ! I ought never to have left him, it was a mad idea."

" You lose time," said Elise. " Do go and tell Mademoiselle Jeanne."

" Well, then, come with me, that will save it, and you can tell your news yourself to Mam'zelle Jeanne."

She waddled on in front of her visitor. Jeanne was still pacing up and down. She stopped and looked surprised.

Marie pushed forward.

" There is bad news, Monsieur Eugène is ill," she said, " and the doctor has sent to tell Mademoiselle."

" You can go," Elise said to the servant; " my message is for Mademoiselle de Matagne herself."

She spoke with such profound respect that Marie departed, and Jeanne recovered from her first shock of surprise at seeing the photographer's shop-woman.

"Is he very ill?" she said.

"Yes, Mademoiselle." Elise walked on as she spoke, though they were already at some distance from the house. "At least, no," she said, abruptly, "I do not come from Monsieur de Matagne. I come as a friend to give you warning of danger."

She gave Jeanne a friendly smile. She saw that she looked displeased.

"Why did you begin with a falsehood?" said Jeanne, firmly: "and what can you have to do with me?"

"You will see when I have told you." Elise spoke very calmly. "You are in danger, Mademoiselle. There is a man over there," she nodded across the river, "you know him; he has sworn that he will never rest till you are his wife, either by fair means or foul."

Jeanne could not guess the woman's drift, but this statement seemed to her false and exaggerated.

"You talk nonsense," she said. "I suppose you are speaking of Monsieur Vidonze, and he knows that I shall never marry him; he knew it long ago."

Elise smiled. It was pleasant to hear this, and she felt almost grateful to Jeanne for the admission.

"You do not know him as I do," she said; "he tells me that he has your grandmother's consent, and that he will marry you. What he says he will do. He sent for me that I might help him, and it was he who suggested the plan of Monsieur de Matagne's message, though I could have got in without that," she said, scornfully; "he wanted me to contrive some way in which he might meet you face to face; but now I am here I see how easily he can meet you if he chooses," and she pointed to the low fence which divided the farthest end of the grounds from the cliffs beyond. "You need not be afraid," for she saw

Jeanne look earnestly at the fence. "I am not going to betray you to Monsieur Vidonze; on the contrary, I would much rather help you."

"Thank you." Jeanne felt again the strong repugnance which had seized her each time that she had met Mademoiselle Herkenne; "but I do not want help. Monsieur Vidonze is too wise to get himself into trouble by molesting me. I have refused to see him." she said this calmly, but she trembled inwardly at the bare thought of meeting Vidonze face to face.

"You are courageous, Mademoiselle, but courage is foolhardiness when it goes too far. I ask you what is to hinder a determined man like Monsieur Vidonze from climbing that fence and forcing you to go away with him. He has the law on his side; remember your grandmother gave her consent. He will easily find a priest to perform the cere-

mony," she laughed, "and then, once married to him, what help have you—?"

"Hush," said Jeanne; "you had better go away. I do not wish to listen to you."

But Elise did not pause. "You are his wife to do as he pleases with."

"Stay," for Jeanne had turned from her, and was walking towards the house, "there is an easy way of escape from him, Mademoiselle"—she got in front of Jeanne and went on, speaking quickly—"that is what I have come to tell you. There is one who loves you just as passionately as Vidonze does, and far more truly. That man is here, close by. He has left wife and fortune for your sake. Go with him at once; then you will be for ever free from Vidonze, and you will be as happy as the day is long. Happy! *Mon Dieu!* if such joy were offered to me I would take it without a moment's delay."

"How dare you talk to me in this

way? let me pass," said Jeanne; "you are a wicked woman, and you have no right to come here and insult me."

Elise put her hand on the girl's arm, and as Jeanne tried to free herself she tightened her grasp.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," she said, "but I think you do not see how matters stand. I am your true friend. Edmond Dupuis has deserted his wife, and he cannot return to her. He is an outcast for your sake. Surely you will have pity on him. Surely you will reward the faithful love which has given up all for you."

"Hush, hush," said Jeanne, "you are quite mistaken; it is impossible that I can be anything to Monsieur Dupuis, and you insult me by talking such shameless words. Leave me," she said, sternly, "and let me never see you again."

So terrible a light shone in her visitor's eyes that Jeanne had almost cried out

for Marie, but self-command came back. The kitchen was on the other side of the Château, looking towards the road. Marie could not hear her outcry, and by showing fear she should lose her control over this wild woman.

“I am going”—Elise spoke quietly, but her face had lost its repose; strong twitches of passion showed at the corners of her mouth, and her eyebrows met in a fierce frown, “but you shall hear the truth first, Jeanne Lahaye. Who are you, a mere peasant, that you should be raised to ease and luxury, and spoil the lives of others by winning the love that is theirs by right? Yes, you have spoiled my life, and the life of Edmond’s wife; but for your pale, cold face Antoine Vidonze would be mine now. I tell you, you pale-faced hypocrite, that you have never even dreamed of the love I have lavished on him. Yes, you are a hypocrite. One day you have kissed

and fondled that poor little fool Pauline, and won her heart out of her body, and the next you have met her husband in secret. Yes, yes ; I know you thoroughly. You prefer that Edmond Dupuis should stay with his wife, it avoids scandal ; but he is your lover for all that, you have turned his heart away from his wife, and you shall leave Château Montcour with him, or I will proclaim publicly that you love him. Will you go with him, or will you not ?" Her words poured out at last in a torrent of fury.

" Let me go."

Jeanne wrenched her arm away, but before she could escape Elise's arms had closed round her like a vice, and were quickly drawing her in among the thin bushes, at this point the only fence above the perpendicular descent to the river. Jeanne struggled, but she could not free herself. She tried to drag her adversary back with her on to the path, but Made-

moiselle Herkenne stood firm, and Jeanne saw that she meant to push her over the edge. They were well matched for strength, but Jeanne was only defending herself, and Elise was putting out all her power to conquer. Suddenly she lifted Jeanne off her feet—but the girl clung tightly round her neck, and throwing all her weight forward she forced her adversary to the ground—she fell also, shrieking loudly for help. Mademoiselle Herkenne sprang quickly to her feet, and seized Jeanne by the shoulders. She strove to drag her to the edge of the cliff, but Jeanne grasped at the bushes near her, and clung with the strength of despair. She had fallen a short way from the edge—her head was dizzy with her heavy fall, and she felt that her enemy would soon overpower her. All at once Mademoiselle Herkenne's hold on her arms slightly loosened—Jeanne gave a long, despairing shriek. Then her eyes closed.

Elise's quick ears had heard sounds near them; she instantly loosened her grasp and rose to her feet. Then came hasty footsteps running, and an outcry of surprise. Jeanne felt herself raised up in some one's arms, and she rallied from the stupor that had overcome her—she opened her eyes—Mademoiselle Herkenne had disappeared, and Edmond Dupuis, very pale and breathless, was standing beside her.

“Edmond! you?” she said, faintly.

Jeanne tried to move, but she could not without Edmond's help, her head reeled, everything seemed to be fading away, but she was unwilling to lean on him, and he saw it. He drew her gently to the nearest tree, and seated her against it.”

“Rest there,” he said, “till I bring help.”

In a few minutes he came back, carrying a chair and a glass of water, while Marie followed, full of exclamations.

"It was a good thing for your mistress," Edmond said, "that I happened to be near ; that mad woman was trying to force her over the cliff."

Jeanne looked at him gratefully. She tried hard not to show how much she was suffering.

"Oh, *mon Dieu* ! Oh, my poor lamb ! Oh, Holy Virgin ! her face is bleeding."

Marie was noisy with fear and sympathy ; but Edmond told her the first thing to be done was to send for the doctor, while he took her mistress to the house.

As soon as she was gone, Jeanne looked at Edmond.

"Thank you," she said, faintly ; "I believe you have saved my life."

"You would perhaps have saved yourself, Jeanne," he said, earnestly. "I risked making you angry with me by coming this morning ; but, on my honour, I only came to warn you against that

fiend of a woman. She had told me that mischief was plotted against you, and I came to warn you to go away from this place. I thought only of annoyance to you; I did not dread such a danger as this."

"Thank you; I believe you." Edmond's heart swelled as he saw the old sweetness come back to her eyes as she looked at him. "I might have known you would not have come without cause." She spoke slowly and with an effort; the numbness was passing away, but she was still faint, and her whole body was wrenched with pain.

He saw how much she was suffering, and he hesitated to speak; but this was their last meeting. He had sworn to himself that, till he could look on her sweet face calmly—and he thought this could never be—he would never see her again—he must speak now.

"I will leave you as soon as the doctor

comes," he said ; " this is the only chance I have of speaking. Will you tell me you forgive me, Jeanne, for all I have caused you to suffer ? I have been cruel to you —unpardonable ; but you are so noble, Jeanne, so generous, that you will have pity."

She did not speak, but tears fell fast from her half-closed eyes.

" I will try to do all you asked me, Jeanne," he said ; " it will be hard, but I deserve hardness. May I kiss this hand once more ?"

She gave him her hand, and he kissed it as one might kiss the hand of a dying person ; and then Jeanne's strength gave way, and she lost consciousness.

When Marie came with a woman she had summoned to help her, she met Monsieur Dupuis running wildly to the Château.

" She has fainted," he said ; " we must contrive a litter to carry her indoors. I fear she has been seriously hurt."

CHAPTER XX.

A REVELATION

EDMOND had carefully avoided Vidonze, but the photographer soon learned that he had slept at the Coq d'Or.

"And I think," Charles Cajot softly rubbed his hands as he communicated this information, "that Monsieur has gone up to the Château this morning."

Vidonze ground his teeth with rage. This was a confirmation of his house-keeper's story. His impulse was to rush over to Château Montcour, but Mademoiselle Herkenne must be there by this

time, and he might injure his cause by interference. So he nodded to Charles and sauntered out, smiling at old Jacques who pretended to be asleep in the vine-covered arbour—a sun-trap now that almost all the leaves had fallen from the angular and twisted brown stems.

“ That fellow is a sulky old fool,” said Vidonze as he passed, “ he never has a word to say to me.”

He sauntered down to the river; he was artist enough to like to watch the endless play of light and shade on the water, and on the grey stones against which it struggled; to-day however he was too impatient to look long at anything; but he strove to put a strong curb upon his feelings; he well knew there was no use in being impatient. Mademoiselle Herkenne might find some difficulty in getting to Jeanne, and then it might take long to overcome the girl’s unwillingness to see him. He believed that she had loved

Edmond Dupuis; but he was the safer for that reason, he thought. He had so high an opinion of Jeanne that he felt it was impossible that she would now listen to Edmond Dupuis' love, and it was more than likely that she would wish to marry in order to show her indifference, and also to put an end to her former lover's folly.

Vidonze felt indignant at Edmond's conduct. "Old Baconfoy would disinherit him if he only guessed it," he said.

He went on beside the river till he got to the point where it sweeps into shadow beneath the lofty rocks beyond the Château.

After awhile he turned to go back to the inn—and a few paces off, as if she had suddenly sprung out of the ground, appeared Mademoiselle Herkenne. She looked pale and troubled, he thought; her skirts dripped with water, and her dress was torn and disordered.

"Where have you come from? What has happened?" he spoke quickly almost angrily, for there was not a ray of hope or of success in her face. "How could you get back so soon?"

She moved her head impatiently; she was too overwrought for such a trifling question.

"I have brought you an answer," she said.

"She refuses?"

"Yes, she refuses to see you; she says she could never love you,"—she fixed her eyes on him so intently that, bold as he was, he almost flinched under her gaze—"and I left her with Monsieur Dupuis."

She paused, devouring his face with a look from which all reserve was forcibly thrown aside; but the hope that this proof against Jeanne must kill his love for her was soon quenched.

"Curse him; but Jeanne will not listen

to him. She will turn to me for refuge against the villain. If I can only see her all will be well."

" And you would make her your wife after all," she said, bitterly.

" Why not? she is the only woman I have ever really loved; the only one that could make marriage endurable to me. I will go through fire and water to win her."

" You are a fool," said Mademoiselle Herkenne.

Vidonze stared in utter amazement; it was so wonderful that his proud, dignified housekeeper could so far forget herself; but all at once the reason of her bitterness revealed itself. It was plain she was jealous of Jeanne's power over him; she feared that a wife would destroy her influence, and probably oust her altogether. He smiled as he stood thinking; she was so useful to him that he could not allow even a wife to upset

her management of his affairs; no doubt the confidence he had placed in her, and the way in which he had sought her advice had flattered the poor soul.

This smiling silence maddened Elise Herkenne; she believed that she had betrayed herself.

"Do not look angry, my good friend," Vidonze spoke in a soothing voice. "If I marry it will make no difference to you; I shall not send my best friend away"—he took her hand in the excess of his benignity. "When you come to know Jeanne you will see that she will not interfere with you; besides, she and I shall live at Namur, you will have it all your own way at Dinant."

She flung his hand away with a force that startled him.

"Yes, you are a fool, Antoine Vidonze, and fools are always blind. What do you think women are made of, that you suppose this girl will take you while her heart is

full of another man's love ? for I tell you it is, and she will never cure of it—never. *Mon Dieu !* and for this pale creature who detests you, you have flung away a love that would have worshipped the ground you trod on ; that would have died for you—but listen, Antoine Vidonze, it is not my fault that your Jeanne is still alive”—she went on wildly—“ she has escaped this time, but if you persist in trying to make her your wife, she shall die—she must die, I have sworn it—so cure yourself of your mad love while there is time.”

The bronzed red on his face changed to a ghastly paleness ; spite of his strength he shivered with horror as Elise, like a fury with flashing eyes, announced her murderous intention—and while he stood staring at her with widely-parted lips, she fled and was soon hidden from sight behind the bushes which divided the strip of meadow from the road.

“ Stay—stay, Elise Herkenne,” he cried,

and followed her; but when he reached the road she was not to be seen, and he hurried back to the inn, thinking that, when her passion had spent itself, she would probably return there.

But she did not come; and before long Baptiste arrived from the Château, driving in hot haste, on his way to fetch the doctor: Baptiste was shaking with excitement.

“*Mon Dieu!* a madwoman has got into the garden,” he cried, “and she has nearly murdered Mademoiselle Jeanne, and Monsieur Dupuis has saved her, and now he is going to fetch Monsieur Eugène home again.”

At which news Vidonze felt greatly disturbed, for he saw that the brothers Cajot were exchanging significant glances, and that Auguste was scowling at him.

“Search must be made for the madwoman,” he said; “no doubt she

will be found between Comblain and the station."

He spoke decidedly ; and he took the lead in the search with so much energy and masterfulness that even old Jacques was satisfied with his zeal in Jeanne's cause.

But the search was unsuccessful ; no trace was found of Mademoiselle Herkenne.

CHAPTER XXI.

A RETURN.

WHEN Edmond had seen Jeanne under the care of the doctor, who told him she had suffered no serious bodily injury, he hastened back to Dinant to break the news to Monsieur Eugène.

The poor old man was terribly frightened, though Edmond told him as tenderly as he could.

He gave a very simple account of the accident. He said that a madwoman had got into the grounds and had tried to push Mademoiselle de Matagne over the cliff, and that, being near at hand, he

heard cries for help ; he had climbed the fence and rescued Jeanne.

Monsieur Eugène's alarm was so great that he wrote to summon his brother to Montcour ; but Edmond was surprised at the energy the old man showed. He gave orders to his servant for them to return at once to Château Montcour.

Then, when Edmond had done all he could for Jeanne, he turned wearily home-wards.

He had decided how to act.

The shock of seeing Jeanne lying white and still, with that murderous face glaring above her, had roused him as he had never been roused in his life before. He could not shake off the impression—it haunted him ; and besides this he felt deeply anxious as to what the result might be.

The doctor had said that, though there were no injuries beyond bruises, the system had been rudely shocked, and that

it was possible that Mademoiselle Jeanne would have serious illness.

Edmond felt as if his promise to Jeanne had been made beside a death-bed—that kiss on her hand had ratified it; whatever the pain might be, he must abide by that promise now.

He hoped to have found Pauline alone, but when he went into the room Monsieur Baconfoy and Madame Boulotte were sitting with his wife. They kept silent, but Pauline ran to Edmond and threw herself into his arms with a burst of joy.

He kissed her, and then he went forward and shook hands with Madame Boulotte, too much absorbed to notice her coldness.

“ You must all have wondered what had become of me. Urgent business took me away quite suddenly. I hoped to come back last night, but I could not. I am afraid you were anxious, Pauline.” He

looked at his wife so kindly that Madame Boulotte was somewhat appeased.

“Thank God you are safe,” said Pauline.

“Of course she was anxious; so we all were,” Baconfoy said, bluffly, but he did not smile.

“So Monsieur Baconfoy kindly came and fetched me to stay with her,” said the widow; “but really, Monsieur Dupuis, you could have telegraphed.”

“It was not possible to do so.” Edmond spoke quietly, but he did not offer any explanation, and the widow was ruffled.

“You must be hungry,” said Pauline. “You must have some breakfast;” and she hurried away to Valérie. Madame Boulotte shrugged her shoulders.

“*Mon Dieu!* some wives ——” She did not finish her sentence. “That child is an angel,” she said, and she went after Pauline.

Baconfoy stood, awkwardly silent, with his hands in his pockets. He wished Edmond to feel that he was displeased ; and yet it occurred to him that a man had a right to do as he chose in his own affairs.

Edmond was silent too, but he was not confused or ashamed ; he was only deciding what to say to his cousin.

“ Jules,” he said, after a pause, “ I know what you are thinking of me, and I know I deserve to be thought badly of, but not for this absence.” The deep feeling in his voice roused Baconfoy. “ I have had a great sorrow ; but I am going to tell my wife everything, and then, if she can forgive me, I think silence is best and easiest for us all. But I want your advice, my good Jules.”

He put his hand affectionately on the big man’s shoulder, and met the searching gaze of those piercing dark eyes

so frankly and fearlessly that Baconfoy felt a sensation of surprise—the surprise mingled with a thrill of interest, which we all feel when some one with whom we have lived closely for years reveals an inner depth of which we in our blindness and self-conceit had thought him incapable.

“What is it, my boy?” the older man said, affectionately taking Edmond’s hand. “I will advise you as I best may when I know your trouble.”

“I will tell this much. I have not been a good husband to Pauline, though outwardly I may have seemed so—I ought not to have married her. The past has been against me; but in the future I trust she will find me changed—that is if she forgives the past—but for both our sakes it will be best to part at present.”

Baconfoy shook his head.

“To part! No, Edmond; what will be said? You will make a scandal that

you will never outlive. You do not know the world as well as I do, my dear boy."

"I cannot help what the world says. I know I am right. There need be no scandal, a good reason shall be given—an artist often goes away for study ; I am out of health ; I shall go and study for a time ; but I want to know if you think Madame Boulotte will take care of Pauline ?"

"There is no fear of that ; she has been like a mother to her in your absence. But I tell you frankly she will not approve of your going away, and I have the highest opinion of Madame's sense and judgment."

"My going is my affair and my wife's." Edmond spoke quietly but so firmly that Baconfoy could only shrug his shoulders, and thrust his hands deeper than ever into his capacious pockets.

About an hour later Edmond and

Pauline were walking in the wood that clothes the cliff behind the Public Gardens of Dinant. He had asked her to come with him gravely, and in so sad a voice that Pauline had walked beside him in silence, her usual prattle checked by a strange feeling of expectancy.

When they were fairly in the wood, where large blocks of stone here and there offered moss-grown seats under the fast thinning leafage overhead, Edmond's pace slackened.

"Pauline," he said, earnestly, "I have come here that we may be quite alone. I know I have made you very unhappy by my manner towards you. I have been very selfish. Can you forgive me?"

"I have always forgiven you, Edmond," she said, timidly, for this new manner of her husband's frightened her. "If I had not been so silly you would have been different."

" You have much to forgive me, my darling child. You are a good, generous little thing," he said, warmly ; " but you may spare yourself that sting. I should have been the same in any case."

She began to understand now. She trembled, and her eyes grew large with fear of what was coming.

" All this while," he spoke fast, as if to get it said before his courage failed, " I have not been loving you, and if you had not been a good woman—an angel—I cannot say where my folly would have ended. God has been merciful to me."

He paused ; but Pauline was crying silently, she could not speak ; she felt as if her heart must break. She had often said Edmoud did not love her, but it was quite different to hear him say he had all this time, even while he had treated her as a wife, never loved her.

" You are not obliged to forgive me," he said, " many wives would never forgive such conduct, and if you prefer it, you shall be left free. I must still remain your husband in name, but we need not meet."

Pauline's tears had stopped.

" Is this your wish?" she said, in a heart-broken voice. " Do you hate me, Edmond?"

" That is not the question," he said. " I only want to consult you on our future. I will say this much, that whichever way you decide you will never lose my esteem; but you shall not be asked to decide hastily; for the present we will part. I will go to Italy and study my art, and if, after a while, you are content to give me another trial, I will try to deserve your love, and to make you happy—if I can."

He had risen, and he stood before her like a criminal, with bent head.

Pauline caught at his hand and covered it with kisses.

"Oh, my darling," she said, "I do not want to think. Do not leave me, I know you can make me happy. It has all been my fault, for you never promised to love me."

"Yes, I did," he said, gravely; "I swore it before the altar; but, dear wife," he took her in his arms and kissed her, with a tenderness that set her tears flowing again, "it must be as I say; it will be best for both of us. Then when we meet we will never separate again, my Pauline."

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

MONTHS have passed since Jeanne and Edmond parted; the illness which has kept Jeanne lying prisoned in her bed has brought her so near death that now—as she is placed on the sofa downstairs, and can once more see the sky and the bare branches of the trees waving in the crisp wintry air—it seems to her that she has died literally, and that this is a new world to which she has wakened—a new life which opens before her, to be lived.

She says this to good Father Hallez

as he sits beside her, rejoicing in her improved looks. He has been often at Château Montcour during her illness, but to-day Jeanne has summoned him specially.

The brain-fever which seized her after her terrible struggle, had made it necessary to keep her free from all mental exertion, but now she feels able to talk and explain her plans, and she wants the good priest's help.

He has always appreciated Jeanne as truly as he has loved her, and he feels that such a nature must be allowed to cure itself in its own way, and when she told him that she could never find rest in the quiet routine of life at Château Montcour, he did not contradict her, but bade her wait till her health was stronger before she began plans for the future.

To-day she has been speaking to him fully and freely. She wishes to spend

the handsome marriage portion left to her by Mademoiselle de Matagne in building some wards to be used like the Hospice at Dinant, for the poor of the country afflicted with incurable diseases, and though at first the priest demurs, yet as she goes on with her plan he has yielded.

“I have read and inquired more than you think, Father, and I believe the money will be more than sufficient for the building and the support of three nurses to help me in the work.”

Monsieur Hallez stares in surprise; while he has been content to go on in his daily routine deplored the suffering he is quite unable to minister to, this young girl, lying on her sick-bed, has thought out a plan to benefit others which will involve a life of perpetual self-sacrifice.

“My child,” he says, “have you counted the cost in another way? The

nurses of a hospital have an incessant and monotonous round of daily toil, but in such a refuge as you propose the monotony is much increased, there is comparatively seldom a change in the patients."

"One would get to know them, and love them better for their long stay," says Jeanne, brightly; "one would get to live their lives instead of one's own; why, I should begin with that dear old husband and wife across the river; indeed, Father, it is not monotony that I fear, I only feared whether I was not shrinking from my trial by seeking a life in which I must needs forget it."

Monsieur Hallez takes off his spectacles and wipes the glasses—they are misty.

"Ah!" Jeanne says gaily, "I see you have no objection. Now I want you to explain all this to Monsieur Eugène and Monsieur Raoul—there they are in the garden; afterwards I should like much to see Monsieur Eugène."

Monsieur Hallez leaves her, and Jeanne lies still, awaiting his return. The exertion of speaking has brought a faint rosy tinge to her pale, sunken cheeks, and her loving brown eyes look brighter than they have looked since her illness. As she gazes out at the window, between the muslin curtains that almost meet in the centre, the sun falls on her hair, closely cropped during her illness, and turns it into clustering rings of gold. The brothers pass out of sight as they walk ; before the priest can overtake them she sees them turn into the path where she and Edmond parted. . . .

She turns away and tears fill her eyes. Presently she smiles. "They are the last," she says ; "they belong to the old life, and must be buried with it. Perhaps, if I had not loved Edmond so much, I should have grown cold, and God would not have taught me this way of showing my love to Him. It is true what dear

Mademoiselle said to me one day, that human love is only a reflection of God's love; it is perhaps our apprenticeship to learn how they love in Heaven. . . .”

Now she sees Monsieur Hallez and Monsieur Eugène coming back, and the priest is talking earnestly, as if trying to convince his companion.

And very soon Monsieur Eugène is standing beside her sofa, holding her hand in both his, and assuring her, in his gentle pathetic voice, how rejoiced he is to see her downstairs again. He has brought her a few violets, and before he seats himself he carefully puts these in water and places them on a little table close by Jeanne.

“ You are so kind, and they are so sweet,” she says, gratefully.

Monsieur Eugène only presses her hand. Now that he sees Jeanne in full daylight, he is shocked at the change in her sweet, young face, for her eyes seem to have

gone back in her head, and her nose is pinched and sharp. He sees, too, how colourless are her lips, and how wasted and wan are the slender white fingers that he holds ; how changed from the plump, shapely, brown hand that was always so prompt in rendering him service. He sighs deeply.

“ Uncle,” says Jeanne, all her old gaiety shining in her clear eyes, “ you will not do for one of my nurses. I shall not employ you ; you ought never to sigh when you visit a patient.”

“ Ah, yes, forgive me. What is this, my dear, dear child ? Monsieur Hallez has been talking to me about it, but you and he are both wrong, Jeanne. At least I think you are wrong, and so does Raoul ; he says you are sure to marry some day, Jeanne.”

Jeanne smiles ; she knows that Monsieur Eugène would never set up his own

opinion unless he had his brother's wisdom to rely on.

She keeps fast hold of one of his hands, and kisses it. "I want you to listen, uncle dear, while I tell you a story. No, do not look at me; you must look at the sunshine out there." She points to the window.

"Once upon a time," she says, looking straight at the wall in front of her—"long before you knew me, uncle—a girl lived with her grandmother in a cottage beside the Meuse. You know where it was. Some one used to come there, and he and the girl loved one another...." A flush rises on her face, but Monsieur Eugène does not move his eyes from the window.

"He is dead," he says, gently.

She does not answer for a few moments.

"He is dead to her," she says in a low voice; "but you know, uncle, that a woman's

love never dies." . . . She lies silent after this with closed eyes, very white and still; only her heaving bosom tells how much the effort to say all this has cost her.

Monsieur Eugène stands waiting; he fancies Jeanne has not ended, and he fears to interrupt her.

" You understand now," she says at last, in a low, timid voice, " why I could never marry Monsieur Raoul or anyone."

Then Monsieur Eugène turns round; his eyes shine with tears.

" My Jeanne, my darling child," he bends down and kisses her forehead, and his tears fall on her face, " why did you not tell me sooner? I thought it was this; but I could not ask for your confidence. You will never hide any sorrow from me again, my child."

Jeanne gives him such a sweet, loving smile.

" I see I shall have my Hospice," she

says, “ spite of all opposition ; and if I have you to help me, I must be quite happy always.”

“ You are to have some one else too, you are going to have Merette,” says Monsieur Eugène, trying to smile through his tears. “ In your delirium you said you could not live without Merette, so kind Monsieur Hallez has brought her here this morning.”

Jeanne sits upright, her eyes glistening with joy.

“ Ah, it is too kind—dear Merette ! oh, I want to see her !” she says. “ Uncle, I shall get well directly.”

Meantime Vidonze had begun to wonder whether there was any use in trying to win Jeanne. His sister had told him he was foolish to think of it, and Monsieur Baconfoy had simply laughed at him ; and at last he began to see that already he had thrown away more than a year in running

after a shadow. He had given up his shop at Dinant, for the custom there departed when Mademoiselle Herkenne disappeared, and he had almost determined to give up his Namur business also and go to Egypt. Till he lost his housekeeper he did not know how much he owed to her help, and how strongly she had linked him to a settled life. His erratic spirit began to re-assert itself, he longed to travel.

He was now on his way to Rimay to see what Madame Boulotte would say to these plans; with all his anger against Elise, he sometimes thought he had perhaps thrown away a treasure. When he reached his sister's house she was not at home, but he found Pauline there, very subdued and quiet, though very happy. She had received a letter from Edmond a few days before, announcing his return.

"But he is not coming here," she said, "he is only coming to Brussels or

to Cologne to take me back to Italy, and I want Madame Boulotte to go with me to meet him."

"Where is my sister?" said Vidonze, impatiently; he had no sympathy with Pauline, no interest in her proceedings; he sneered as he thought of the revelations he could make to the poor little woman. "But it is not worth while," he said to himself."

Pauline gave him a meaning smile.

"Monsieur Baconfoy is here, and they are taking a walk," she said.

But Vidonze either did not or would not understand; he snatched up his hat and said he should go to find them.

They were not far off. They had been walking up and down, up and down the little Boulevard, under the leafless trees, for half an hour. Now their dispute had ended, or rather had come to a pause. The gentleman looked offended, and the lady's lip curled. They took one more turn.

"Monsieur," she bowed, "I must leave you now. I hope we part friends."

"You have no friendship for me, Madame," he said gruffly.

Madame Boulotte gave a little rippling laugh.

"That is so like a man, and they say only women exaggerate. I promised Edmond Dupuis I would watch over this child-wife of his, and I cannot let her go travelling about by herself."

"Child-wife! a woman who has had two husbands, Madame; she is as able to take care of herself as you are." Here Monsieur Baconfoy cleared his throat, and blew his nose soundingly. "Madame, you once allowed me to suppose you were not indifferent to me, and yet Edmond Dupuis and his wife, a girl whom you used to dislike, are to be considered before me. Pardon me, Madame, but this position is not to be endured. I am a philosopher,

Madame, but I am flesh and blood for all that."

Madame Boulotte glanced at him merrily, he seemed to her so grand, drawn up to his full height, his dark eyes sparkling with impatience, and his heavy grey moustache quivering with wounded feeling, that her love of mischief was subdued.

"Monsieur," she said, sweetly, "did I ever say that I *liked* to go with Pauline Dupuis?"

"Eh, what? then you give it up?" he gave her a sharp glance of inquiry.

"No, I cannot give it up."

Baconfoy shrugged his shoulders.

"You will not, you mean, Madame. I have the honour to wish you good day." He made her a low bow, and the pair parted.

Madame Boulotte walked briskly away, her heart swelling at his injustice. Had she not said she was going against her

will simply to do her duty ; and was he really going to give up all his homage and the love which she had seen in his eyes because of this ?

“ Love ! Bah, nonsense ! ” The widow tossed her comely head with a sort of pity for her new weakness, but she was smarting all the while. How could she do without him ? It would have been all very well if they had continued enemies, as they had been in the days when she had thought of him as a “ fossil.”

“ But he is no fossil ; I know it to my cost,” she sighed. Indeed Baconfoy’s visits and his devotion all through this winter had become part of her life ; and then there were the neighbours ; some of them had already joked her, and asked her when the marriage was to be.

She looked over her shoulder. It was a concession, and she did not like making it, but luckily his back was towards her.

He was standing still, but he had turned away so that he might not see her.

"I wonder if he is unhappy," thought the widow. Her own heartache was getting beyond endurance. "Well, I do not think it is Christian to make a fellow-creature unhappy," and she went back a few steps. She was within speaking distance now, and he need never know she had come back at all. She gave a little cough.

He stood as still as ever. Madame Boulotte coughed more loudly, but he did not turn round.

"He is sulky," said Madame, with a triumphant smile; "I will teach him how to sulk with me again;" and she walked back and touched his arm with the tips of her plump fingers.

"Monsieur," Baconfoy turned round with a start, "I gave you an opportunity just now, but as you passed it by, I was too shy to press it on you. I have since

reflected that, owing to the blindness of your sex, it is possible you were unable to understand it."

Baconfoy felt foolish, and he looked guilty, but expectant.

"Well," she gave a little impatient sigh, "I suppose I ought to rejoice that women are so superior to men; however," she saw his face twitching with impatience, "when I said I must take Pauline to Brussels or to Cologne, or wherever she has to meet this husband of hers, I did not say I must go *alone*." She gave him a grave, demure glance.

Baconfoy snatched her hand and drew it under his arm.

"Madame," he whispered, "you are an angel, and I am a sulky old fool. We will go to Brussels together—but we will be married first, if you please."

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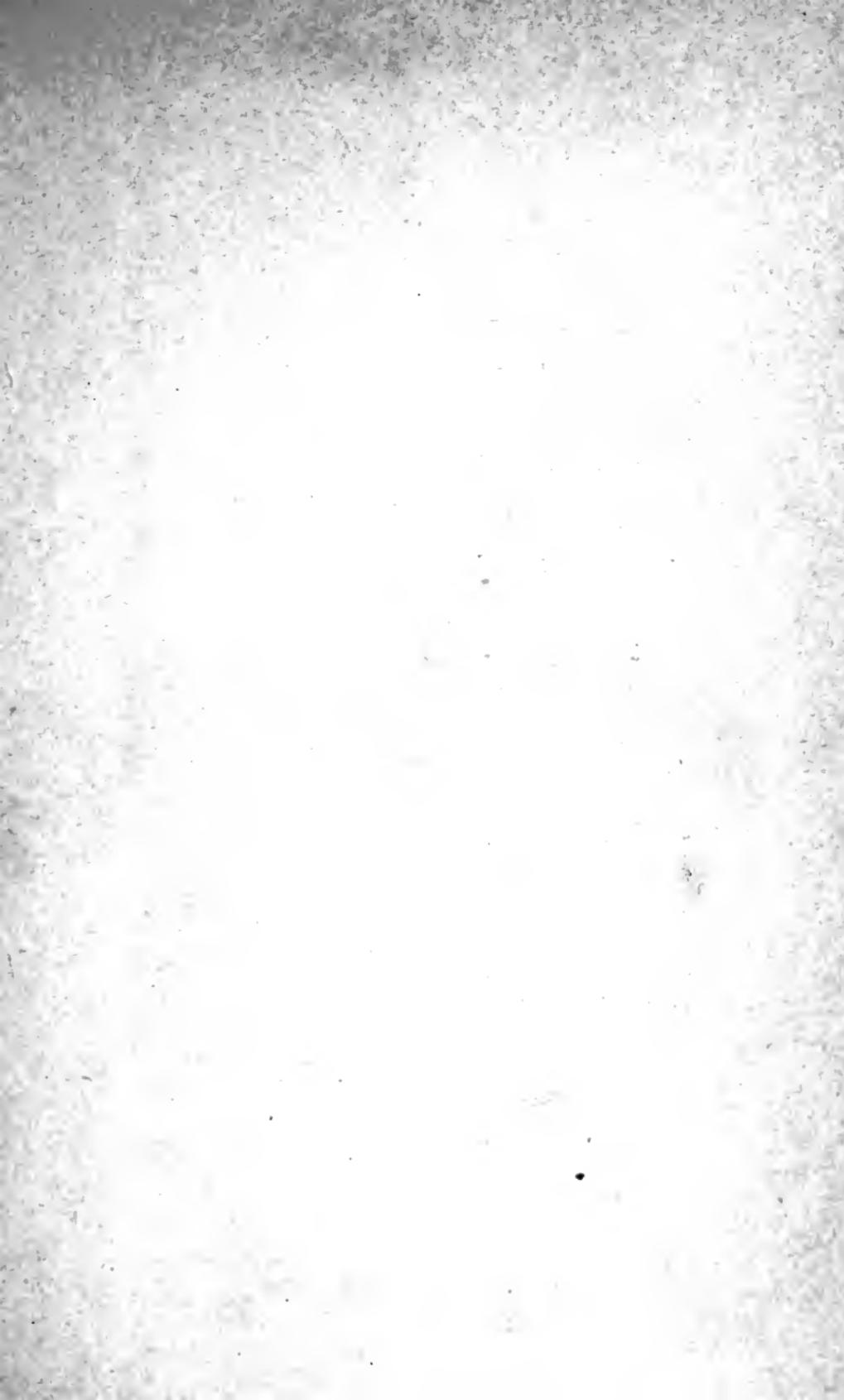
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